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B E S S I E .

A NOVEL.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

“NATHALIE,” “ADELE,” “SILVIA,” “QUEEN MAB,” DORA,”
“MADELINE,” ETC., ETC.

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B E S S I E .

CHAPTER I.

"HAVE you ever been in Fontainebleau?"

The question was not meant for me. The speaker who uttered it was soon lost in the crowd. I did not see his face, and he little knew what visions those words, thus spoken, may be at random, evoked in a woman's heart.

The names of places are like spells in the fairy-tales. Swift as light they bear us away from one spot to another. We were in a room, firmly shut in with walls, and doors, and windows, all fast, and, lo and behold you, we are conveyed in a trice to a wilderness with sand and rocky waste, or to a green forest with the gloom of huge old trees! We sat by the bright wood-fire, with the light shining on the pages of our book; and now we are in a summer scene. The sun is hot, water is flowing softly on the pebbly banks of a little brook, and birds are singing for us in a tree, while shade and sunshine are playing at hide-and-seek in the grass. And then famous places—world-known places which we have seen, or long to see! The Desert and the Pyramids, Rome and the Forum, Constantinople and the Bosphorus—how they all come before us, grand, impressive, or splendid, when their names are uttered! There is no magic like it! Its power may fade away as years come on, for then the walls of home rise higher and higher around us, and hide more and more the bright world of fancy from our view, and the to-day and the to-morrow are apt to be very engrossing; but the spell is still a wonderful spell, and need not be uttered by an enchanter's lips to work its magic.

So it was with me when these words were spoken by my side in a crowded room: "Have you been in Fontainebleau?" I heard no answer

to them; I cared to hear none; for, you see, I have been in Fontainebleau, and in that old royal town, and within the shadow, as it were, of that grand old forest, began that year of my life which has been the key to all the rest. There it was that the first act in my little drama—have we not all got ours?—took place; the first act without which, though I was only a looker-on, a sort of Greek chorus, the other one, when I, too, had to play my part, the great second act which still endures, could never have been.

I was a very little child when both my parents died, leaving me two hundred a year—and bequeathing me to the care of Mr. de Lusignan. He was abroad at the time, but he wrote home to his solicitor about me, and that gentleman placed me at once under Mrs. Dawson's care. "I have three pupils, never more," said Mrs. Dawson. I have been told that she added "never less;" but that must have been a fiction, for Jane and Arabella Wynne left us before my first year was out, and were never replaced. For eleven years I was the only pupil, the solitary boast of dear, good, indolent Mrs. Dawson. She was the solicitor's first-cousin, or, better still, his first love, so she felt quite sure of me; and as I paid her rent, her taxes, and one of her two servants, she was content that her widow's pension should eke out the rest of her income. "Girls are such a trouble," she said, as if to justify herself for not giving me the two companions I was entitled to. "You can't think how much happier you are without them, dear."

I suppose girls are a trouble, but, having no experience of them, I could not think so then. However, with my little lot, ~~soon~~ as it was, I felt content.

Life is very sweet and fair to the young. It is a wonderful book, and every page we turn

bears its own bright story. There is much sunshine and little shade in that golden age of life.

I knew I was alone in the world—alone, save for my cousin, James Carr, who always called to see me when he came to town twice a year; and for my guardian, whom I never saw, but who wrote to me every now and then, yet, spite the knowledge, I was very happy.

I could not help it; no more than a kitten can help being frisky, or a young bird can avoid trying its little, weak pipe at a chirrup, and mercurially attempting to sing.

Moreover, Mrs. Dawson was a most good-natured lady, and every thing about her, from her chairs to her temper, was comfortable and easy. She lived in a pleasant old house in Kensington, and these were the halcyon days when Kensington was an old court suburb, and had nothing to do with the smoke and din of metropolitan railways. To this house was attached a little garden, with ivied walls, and a green grass-plot, where a central stone vase, full of flowers, was in bloom from early spring to late autumn. That garden the windows of my room overlooked, and beyond it I had a glimpse of the Surrey hills, fading away in the blue distance of a dreamy horizon. I fear that a good deal of my time was devoted to these two windows. Mrs. Dawson never interfered with me. I was a valuable pupil, and she would not have worried me for worlds. She could not bear being worried herself, and, as "dear Bessie Carr was sure never to want, why on earth should she be vexed or troubled?" So Mrs. Dawson, who was essentially a lady of the old school, near whom the abomination of slang had never come, but who had also eschewed many things besides slang, taught me to speak correct English, to write a fair hand, and to play well—for she was an accomplished musician—and piously trusted me to Providence for the rest. Providence came to the rescue under the shape of her brother, a pale little white-haired invalid man, with bright black eyes, a wonderfully-stored mind, and a fiery heart—no other words will apply to him who took me in hand. What I know, be it much or little, I owe to him. I was rather afraid of "Uncle John," as I called him, for he was irritable at times, and always impetuous, but I liked him too, and thought him a prodigy of learning, a living cyclopædia, which, after a fashion, he was. Greek and mechanics, logarithms and Hebrew, seemed equally familiar to him. He would give you the whole history of the steam-engine at one moment, and quote the Talmud in the next

breath. The most varied lore fell from his pale, faded lips, as freely as pearls and diamonds were dropped by the beautiful girl in the fairy-tale, whose rosy mouth was thought sufficient dower by a king's son.

The dust of years is lying on your pale face, Uncle John, but never can I forget the happy winter evenings I spent in the warm parlor of the old house in Kensington, listening to you. The gilt bindings of the unread books in Mrs. Dawson's mahogany book-case, the frames of the pictures on the walls, the venerable chairs themselves, all shone again in the firelight, making every thing seem doubly genial and pleasant; but most genial, and pleasantest of all, was it to sit on a little hassock at your feet, and hear you, the most eloquent and wisest of men, as I thought you then, while Mrs. Dawson leaned back in her chair, and snored with a gentle, lady-like snore.

I was seventeen when I was called down to the parlor one afternoon in May. Mr. de Lusignan had returned to England, and come to see me. I was shy in those days, and it was with a little fluttering of the heart that I opened the parlor-door, and peeped in before I entered the room. A stream of hazy English sunshine came in through the open window, and in that pale gold, sitting in Uncle John's favorite crimson chair, with his chin resting moodily on his breast, and his hat between his knees, I saw my guardian. I saw him, as girls see, in a second, and from top to toe. Nothing, from his crape hat-band to his brown, ungloved hands, escaped me. Mr. de Lusignan was a short, swarthy, broad-shouldered man, with harsh features, and a pair of quick, dark eyes, that caught mine in a moment, through the chink of the door. A meaning full of fun passed like warm sunshine over his dark face.

"You may as well come in, Bessie," he said, composedly, "I see you."

I obeyed, feeling both foolish and crimson, facts of which my guardian took no notice. He made me sit down by him, and took my hand and stroked it between his own in a caressing sort of way, while he looked at me softly with his big brown eyes. They were very mellow now, and altogether there was a strain of tenderness in him, womanly, spite the essentially manly vigor of his appearance, which had its charm, and was made to fascinate a foolish young thing such as I was then.

"My dear child," he said, in a voice half mirthful, half plaintive, "what a pity, is it not, that we two have been so long apart? I am

sure you would have been quite a comfort to me in my widowhood—now would you not?”

I could not speak, but my heart warmed toward him, and I thought him the kindest of men. Later I learned the exact value of Mr. de Lusignan's pleasant speeches, and how far it was wise to rely upon them. He was by no means an insincere man. Downright untruth never came near him. He was proud, and scorned a lie. But he was also sensitive, variable, and capricious, so that what he said he really meant when he said it; but seldom for more than five minutes after the words had passed his lips. I was pleasant enough to look at in those days; and Mr. de Lusignan found pleasure, I have no doubt, in making my eyes sparkle, and my cheeks deepen in color by these kind words, which cost him nothing, and made the poor young creature so happy.

“Well, we must make up for lost time,” he continued. “Now, you are to imagine that you and I have been meeting daily for a dozen years or so, and, please, do not be shy—no, don't, my dear little girl! Shyness is such a bore! And I am sure you hate being bored, now don't you? So you have been learning all sorts of things, have you not? And you have had some cousin of yours calling upon you, Mrs. Dawson tells me. Who is he?”

My guardian still held my hand, and I could not prevent that tell-tale limb from giving a little nervous start as it lay clasped in his broad palm, and strong, though supple fingers. In a moment, in a second, the mellow brown eyes were piercing me through and through, keen as gimlets.

“Have you read Plutarch's Lives?” he asked, abruptly.

Youth, in its inexperience of life, is apt to be too literal, so I took some pains to explain that, though I had not read all Plutarch's Lives, Uncle John and I had gone through some of them together, and I was even anxious to specify which particular lives these were; but my guardian, who wanted no information on that score, shook his head good-humoredly, with a *va bene*, in which, as in other fragments of foreign speech, he indulged himself, through having lived so long abroad; and continued, in a half-gay, half-serious tone:

“Never mind, dear; what I mean to say is this: in the life of Demetrius there is a pretty story of a young prince who, having fallen in love with the beautiful Stratonice, betrayed his secret to a learned physician, with a long name ending in ‘us,’ by the sudden quickening of his pulse, as this said lady entered the room where

he lay. It is a well-known tale; and Ingres has painted a lovely picture about it. I remember very well falling in love with *his* Stratonice myself. Well, Bessie, my dear, I put no questions—I have no wish to pry into your little secrets—don't tell me any thing, please; neither will I be, if I can help it, that dreadful fellow in the old plays—the harsh guardian. But this I do say, whether your hand,” he released it as he spoke, “told me a true or a false story just now, you shall not marry with my consent—no, not a peer of the realm—till you are twenty-one. So no love-making, no love-letters, *no cousins*, if you please, while you are under my care. I will be answerable for no one's happiness, not even for yours, my dear. When you are your own mistress, you shall marry whomsoever you please.”

It is said of a drowning man that his whole existence passes before him as he fights for breath with the stifling waves; and surely this is true of more things than of that desperate struggle between life and death which takes place beneath the dark waters. I was overwhelmed with mortification and shame as my guardian spoke; and yet in a moment, and at a glance, the whole of the foolish past he thus doomed appeared before me. I saw the simple girl who, when her handsome, authoritative young cousin said to her in Mrs. Dawson's sunlit garden, “You know, Bessie, you are to marry me,” answered him “Yes,” through life-long love, it is true; but who would as soon have taken off her head as she would have said him “Nay,” because of a life-long fear. Again I saw every meeting; again I heard every word there had been between these two. At the same time I had visions of a little velvet casket, in which this exacting cousin's brief letters were treasured; of the angry light that would assuredly flash out of his blue eyes when he learned Mr. de Lusignan's decree; of all the days, and weeks, and months comprised in four weary years; of Uncle John's old copy of Plutarch's Lives; of a young Antiochus and a fair Stratonice; and of a kind guardian, who stroked the hand of his little ward, saying the nicest things to her, but who somehow or other made her feel and understand that she was to give him no sort of trouble. All these things, I say, flashed before me distinct and clear, while my guardian passed sentence on my girl's love, and after a pause resumed:

“I don't see that I have any thing more to say to-day, so good-morning, my dear. As soon as my house in Portland Place is fitted up, I shall come for you.”

He patted my cheek very kindly, and left me

thus. I rushed up to my room, locked the door, flung myself on the bed, and burst into such a passion of sobs and tears as my happy youth had not known before that day.

I cannot tell how long the fit lasted. Length of time matters little. When sorrow has exhausted itself its manifestations must needs cease; so I raised my head, sat up, and feeling my hair all dishevelled, and my whole being wrong somehow or other, I went and looked at myself in the little mahogany-framed mirror on my toilet-table. I remained aghast at the red swollen lids and blotched cheeks which met my view. I could not have imagined that tears, which read so prettily in the poetry of books, were so very unbecoming as all this in the prose of daily life. I was hideous to look at, and James Carr was coming to town, and might call at any time. If he had been actually coming the next minute, I could not have been in a greater hurry than I was to bathe my eyes and apply violet-powder, as it was called then, to my fevered cheek.

It is useless to deny it. Every girl feels that she was born of the sex called fair, and does her little best to win unto herself the gracious epithet. All that moralists may preach on the perishable quality of flesh, will not eradicate the feeling. "*Mademoiselle, tout cela pourrira,*" says the austere Jansenist to Madame de Sévigné's beautiful daughter. "*Oui, Monsieur; mais tout cela n'est pas pourri,*" she gayly answers; and so every girl feels. Tell her that beauty is fleeting, that it has scarce a day, scarce an hour, and remind her, if you like, of the worm and the grave; she will answer you with pretty insolence, "Granted, sir; but deny, if you can, that I am charming now, and deny, if you dare, that, wise as you are, you, too, feel my power!"

I was not very pretty then; I was only pleasant to look at, as are so many girls of my years; but that I was, and, I confess it, I had no peace of mind and no rest until I had restored my appearance to something like decency. This being done, I went to the nearest window, and looked down at the garden, at the blooming vase of flowers, at the sun-tipped ivy on the walls, at the soft, hazy sky, and the bluish Surrey hills, and I asked myself what I had been making such a fright of myself for, and what my trouble had been all about. What had my guardian said? That I was not to marry James Carr till I was twenty-one. Well, and did I want to marry him before that time? Did James even want to marry me? He was barely more than twenty-one himself; he had not long come into the pos-

session of a small embarrassed estate down in Yorkshire, and of three little orphan step-sisters as well. His hands were as full of work as they need well be. It was the most unlikely thing in the world that he should want to marry me soon; but, of course, all his troubles would be over by the time I was twenty-one; and, of course, he would insist on marrying me on my twenty-first birthday; and of course, too, we should both be as happy as the day was long!

Happy youth to be unable to keep sorrow!—and happy youth to mould the future to its own wishes, as a cunning hand moulds common clay into shapes fair and divine! Happy youth, I say, for is not Hope always by its side, holding up that pleasant mirror in which life is shown in colors which no life—not even the happiest—can ever wear?

I do not know that I dreamed of a fate above that of my fellow-creatures. James Carr was a dear, good fellow, who was very fond of me; but, I suppose, there might be bliss more exquisite than that of becoming Mrs. Carr, and living in an old brick house somewhere down in Yorkshire, with three obstreperous little sisters-in-law (who were all red-haired; dear James was himself a deep gold). For all this was not in itself the ideal, romantic, impossible happiness of a deluded girl's imagination; but, alas! ideal, romantic, and impossible in so far it was that there were no shades in the picture. Truly, in that future, as shown by Hope's deceiving mirror, there was no weariness of love in James Carr's heart; no wonder at a mistake in mine. The grimness of poverty never crossed his threshold, nor abode beneath his roof. No bickerings, no jealousies, no disappointments of any kind, no sickness and no death—gloomy caravans that are ever journeying through the desert of life—entered this favored oasis in which we were to dwell.

I was young, as I have already said; I was also the daughter of an Irishman, so Hope had it all her own way. For a while, I thought kindly and regretfully of dear James, feeling for his vexation—for vexed he would be; then gradually my thoughts merged into other themes, and I wondered when Mr. de Lusignan would come for me, and what his house would be like. Very beautiful and luxurious, no doubt, for he was said to be a rich man, and to spend some money on works of art and *virtu*.

Among the gifts which I derived from my Irish father, ranked an appetite for the splendid and the marvellous; so I reared a sort of Aladdin's Palace in Portland Place. I adorned it

with a lavish hand, and I had wax-lights and chandeliers, and music and dancing, in that home of all delights, and a young Bessie in white muslin, who waltzed with James Carr.

My guardian's house must have been a very beautiful house, indeed, if it took him the long six months to fit up which passed before he came again to see me—six months during which I listened rather absently to Uncle John in the evening, as I sat wondering in my simplicity why James Carr never came and never wrote, and feeling very lonely, and sometimes, too, very sad and very weary.

Mrs. Dawson found out what ailed me, and comforted me after her own fashion.

"Of course you miss Mr. Carr," she said, one day; "very natural, though he looks so—so forbidding."

I had always been afraid of James Carr, but rather than hear him called "forbidding" I was ready to protest that he was warm and benignant as sunshine, so I uttered an "Oh! Mrs. Dawson!" that was intended for an indignant negation.

"My dear, he speaks so sharply to you," she persisted.

Alas! there is nothing new under the sun. My answer was an unconscious plagiarism of Molière's beaten wife: "I like being spoken sharply to by James; it is a proof that he likes me!"

"Dear me, how odd!" innocently said Mrs. Dawson.

She said no more, nor did I. She knew I was vexed with her, as I was also provoked with James Carr. Was it not all his fault if he was thought forbidding? Dear, good, honest, unreasonable and most unreasoning James! He went forth through the world like divine Una, with a roaring lion and a milk-white lamb. But while he tenderly hid the lamb in the folds of his garment, and kept him safe and warm lest cold blasts should pierce him through, he held the lion in so slight a leash that the creature's fiery eyes and grinning teeth frightened all passers-by. I, too, was afraid of that lion after a fashion, but then I never forgot the little lamb that lay nestled near James Carr's heart.

That lion and that lamb were, in one sense, the undoing of James. They helped, at least, to make his life a series of odd mistakes. What the stern lion counselled, the little lamb, as a rule, would not hear of. It would have done James Carr's temper a world of good if he had been a keen sportsman, and spent some of his exuberant strength in the field; but his love and

tenderness for all dumb creatures would never let him; and so it was in all things. He was a strict martinet, a rigid disciplinarian, a good economist; but discipline was forgotten, and the strings of his shallow purse flew open when the poor knocked at his door. They were vagabonds, most of them—at least, James called them so—and the lion would have sent them away with a vengeance; but their hearths were cold, their trenchers were empty, their limbs scantily clad, and the lamb said they must not suffer or die. In one matter alone did lion and lamb agree. When James got a crotchet in his head, they let him keep it. Both knew they might as well attempt to move the foundations of a city as try to dislodge it from that citadel.

The last time James and I had met, that lamb had had it all his own way, and been quite rampant, if I may so speak of this meek animal. James had come to town with his three little sisters, and brought them to see me. I have read that

"A lion will turn and flee

From a maid in the pride of her purity;"

but if James Carr's lion did not fly he did worse—he cowered ignobly at the feet of these three little red-haired maidens; his ears were down, his tail was between his legs; I had never seen so abject a creature. James, of whom I had always been in awe, stood, with regard to these three sisters of his, in the position in which I had so long stood toward him.

Kate and Susan, young ladies of eleven and thirteen, took the poor fellow up very short almost every time he opened his lips.

"I wish, James, you would not tell such stories!" or, "Don't be stupid, James!" were their mildest comments on his discourse.

Deeds, not words, seemed to be the motto of Polly, an artless little lass of seven, for she boxed and kicked James soundly when she discovered that the said James had nefariously sat on the new doll she had intrusted to the keeping of his pocket. James took Kate's "Don't be stupid" and Polly's kicks with great patience; I do believe he was used to both arguments. Yet these little tyrants loved their slave. They worried him, and they were fond of him; but even if there had only been the worrying without the love it would have made no difference to James Carr. Were not these his mother's children, and but for him must not they go forth and be as beggars on the face of the earth? And was not this enough to put him in their power forever

Then how could I, who knew him so well, mind the harshness which hid a heart so tender?

CHAPTER II.

ON a gloomy morning in October I sat alone in the parlor, going through Beethoven's Sonata Pathétique. The day was cold and dull, and I felt very pathetic myself. When I came to the rondo, which, spite its allegro, is so Irish in sadness and in melody, I was just ready to cry. For oh! why did not James Carr come to see me, or why did he not write?

"Time too slow, but otherwise not amiss."

I started up, and beheld Mr. de Lusignan's short, broad figure and dark face behind me. He had been closeted with Mrs. Dawson in the back parlor for the last half-hour without any knowledge of mine.

"Put on your bonnet and cloak," he added, as if we had met the day before. "I have come for you."

I was so bewildered at his sudden appearance that I did not think of answering him, or so much as bidding him a good-morning. I went to the door, then suddenly came back and stood before him.

"Please, sir," I said, very seriously, "is it because you forbade him that James Carr does not come to see me any more?"

My guardian moved uneasily in the chair on which he had thrown himself, in that careless attitude which says so plainly: "I take mine own ease wherever I may be."

A nervous twitch as of annoyance or pain passed across his sensitive dark features, and he said, hurriedly:

"My dear, I have no time to spare."

I felt rebuked, and left the room without uttering another word. My heart was full to breaking, as it seemed to me. I knew now why James Carr did not come, and I all but hated my guardian for his cruelty. Why should I put on my bonnet or cloak? I thought in my room I no longer wished to go to his house in Portland Place. I did not want to cross his threshold, to sit at his table and partake of his good cheer. I felt like the robber in Ali Baba's story. Mr. de Lusignan was my enemy, and I would rather not eat salt with him. At length, thinking I had kept him waiting long enough, I made up my mind to go down. I found Mrs. Dawson sitting alone in the parlor.

"Mr. de Lusignan could not wait any longer," she said, with her easy, indolent smile, "you should dress more quickly, dear."

"And is he not coming back?" I asked, much dismayed.

"Oh! yes, presently, I believe."

I was so anxious not to keep my guardian waiting a second time, and so fearful lest he should disappoint me again and not take me at all to that house in Portland Place, which in my heart I longed to see, that I would sit with my bonnet on for the rest of the day. But Mr. de Lusignan's "presently" meant a long and entire week of seven days; and I was giving him up in despair, and had made sure I should not see him again for another six months, when he appeared again one evening. He was coming to take me home to dinner with himself and his sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Aubrey. All I knew of this lady was that she was elderly, and had kept house for my guardian since the death of his wife and her sister, a beautiful French governess, whom he had married for her beauty.

I did not keep him waiting this time. I was too glad to have the chance of seeing the house in Portland Place after all; besides, my anger had been much softened by intelligence which Mrs. Dawson had imparted to me on the day which followed my guardian's visit.

"Only think, my dear," she said to me. "I met Mr. Carr in Oxford Street. It seems Mr. de Lusignan will not allow him to see you, until you are twenty-one. But Mr. Carr and he have had a long talk, and every thing is settled comfortably, and Mr. Carr is to write to you."

James Carr did write a brief though kind letter, telling me that he felt Mr. de Lusignan's prohibition very keenly, but that, as my guardian did not exceed his authority, patience was our only remedy. So I was not to fret, but to trust in him as he should trust in me, and we were to be allowed to write to each other every now and then.

This letter made me glad, but it also mortified me. I had always known that dear James was matter-of-fact, but I had not expected that he would take this thing so very coolly. If he bore it thus easily, why should I fret or make myself miserable, whispered Pride; and Pleasure added, why had I foolishly scorned such relaxation as Mr. de Lusignan was willing to give me. So when my guardian came he found me quite anxious to step into the carriage with him, and quite disposed not to trouble him with unpleasant questions on the way.

I had expected the house in Portland Place to be all gold and glitter, or at least all gayety and brightness; instead of which I saw a dwelling fitted up with as much old-fashioned grace as if it had come down to my guardian through a long line of ancestors, each generation adding some token of its own as it went by. It was a

very rich, a very luxurious, a very beautiful home indeed, but it had nothing new or garish about it. I felt not dazzled and enchanted as I had thought to be, but awed and impressed.

"This way, Bessie," said my guardian, showing me up-stairs, past the open door of the dining-room, where I caught a vision of damask, plate, and crystal, such as I had never beheld before; while a delicious fragrance of rich soup, sweeter than perfumes of Araby, stole from the invisible regions below, and assured me that such a dinner as my inexperience knew nothing of, was being prepared for me by the genii of this Aladdin palace.

The drawing-room was vacant, but Mademoiselle Aubrey would come presently, said Mr. de Lusignan, and he bade me sit down. I scarcely ventured to do so; yet in the midst of all this splendor, for such, to my unaccustomed eyes, seemed Turkey carpets, bronzes, pictures, and Buhl cabinets, my swarthy guardian moved like an old gnome—he was fifty-five, but I thought him far gone down in the vale of years—who had conjured it up, and felt too much its master to care about it.

"Ah! here she is!" he said, as the door opened, and I turned round more quickly and eagerly than good-breeding allows.

I had seen one Frenchwoman in my lifetime. She wore a wig, she was yellow and skinny, and she talked incessantly. All other Frenchwomen I logically concluded to be like Madame Dubois. Very different from this sample of Gallic blood was the fair, plump, blue-eyed, and genial lady of sixty who now entered the room, and, kissing me on either cheek, gave me a cordial and gracious welcome. I lost my heart to her at once, and shyness fled as she took my hand, and made me sit down on a low couch by her side. Here and there in life we find gifted beings, men and women, richly dowered, and this lady was one. In youth she had been shrewd and wise, and in age she was warm-hearted and merry. Beauty, indeed, she had never possessed, but in nothing else that Nature bestows was she wanting; and so, as I said, I fell in love with her forthwith.

"I am glad we have met at last," she said, very kindly. "It is no fault of mine if we have not met before this day."

This hit was so evidently meant for my guardian, that I stole an uneasy look toward him; but Mr. de Lusignan, throwing himself carelessly on a chair, which to me seemed far too beautiful to be sat upon, said, with a careless laugh:

"Don't mind me, pray. I have the gift not to hear unless I choose to do so. Please to go on, Mademoiselle Aubrey."

His sister-in-law did not seem to heed this speech; but I felt much abashed, and, in my confusion, I stared at a picture on the wall before me.

"It is a beautiful thing," said the lady. "You draw, of course?"

"Oh! no. I wish I did."

"Well, my dear, and why do you not?"

She looked at her brother-in-law as if to lay the blame upon him. I hastened to say that I had been stupid, and never asked Mr. Aubrey.

"De Lusignan," he corrected, with just a touch of asperity in his tone at my little mistake. I felt more and more abashed, and stammered an apology; but the two names being French, and this having confused me—

"How do you know De Lusignan is a French name?" he shortly interrupted. I felt that he wanted to drive me at bay, so I took courage, and, recovering my composure, I said:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I had been told that you were descended from a Huguenot family of Anjou."

Mr. de Lusignan sat straight up in his chair, and, looking me full in the face, he said, gravely:

"I am descended from Melusina, who was half a fairy, half a fish, and half a woman—so here are three halves for you."

"But there cannot be three halves," I remonstrated, so gravely that he burst out laughing. I felt myself turning scarlet, and resolved not to say another word. Very foolish, I dare say, I looked, as I sat there in my indignation, with eyes downcast, and hands folded on my lap; but it was impossible to be sulky with my guardian, as I found, for, taking no sort of notice of my displeasure, he resumed:

"I confess there have been a few men and women in our family since Melusina cheated the first De Lusignan into marrying her, and, among the rest, a wretched fanatic, who gave up the most delightful picturesque little *château* in Anjou for conscience' sake. A great mistake, you know, since his descendants chose to go back to the old faith which he had left. I wish they could have gone back to the *château* too. I saw it last year, and envied its owner, a little fat man, who trots about in *sabots*, and reckons up the eggs his hens lay for him every morning. Happy man! How I envied him!"

"Did you, really?" I could not help saying, in some wonder.

"Of course I did. I hope you believe every word I say."

"I always do believe what people say, sir."

My guardian threw up his hands in mock despair.

"And is it so?" he cried. "Must I, who delight in paradox, ever be persecuted with matter of fact? I suppose it is a hopeless case. People will not understand each other in this world of ours. Captain Ross could never make the Esquimaux comprehend the meaning of the word 'tree.' That wonderful assemblage of stately trunk and graceful bough and rich foliage, with birds singing sweet idyls beneath the leaves, was an eternal blank to them. As they were, so are we all, more or less. Not one of us can understand another man's hobby; yet, believe me, young lady, there is no taste, no pursuit, howsoever strange and foolish it may seem, which does not possess some wonderful charm for its special votaries, some secret delight, forever hidden from the rest of the world, and to them both exquisite and perfect. And the upshot and moral of this tirade is, that I delight in fancy, and that literal people, without imagination, weigh me down dreadfully; so please, Bessie, my dear, do not overpower me with your matter-of-fact ways."

I thought my guardian both rude and sarcastic. I thought, too, and it required little discrimination to reach the conclusion, that he had a very capricious, a very uncertain—nay, let us call things by the name that belongeth unto them—a very bad temper; but, for all that, he amused me exceedingly, and amusement goes a great way with the young. I wished, however, he would not talk quite so much, and let Mademoiselle Aubrey, who did not look as if she were a silent person, speak. But, though she sat there listening to him so quietly, and never putting in a word, I thought even then, and time showed me I was not mistaken, that she exercised a sort of control over my wayward guardian. I do not think he ever asked or followed her advice, that her wishes ruled his, or that his judgment was guided by hers, but I learned afterward, by personal experience, as I felt then by intuition, that in her presence he never allowed his temper full play; while, for no other reason than that she was his superior in every respect, he half disliked and half feared her. This dislike, be it understood, was rather a want of sympathy than an active feeling, and this fear led to no other result than to curb him in a little, a very little, in trifles. If it be asked why Mr. de Lusignan, not being married to this lady, kept her in his house, I can only reply that it was so, and assign no other reason for it than the inconsistency which marked all his actions.

We had a very pleasant dinner. Pleasant in

more senses than one. I was new to French cookery, and mistrustful of it upon hearsay; but its fascinations are great, and I felt them even at that early age, when appetite is all, and taste is still unformed and crude. Surely such nice-looking and nice-tasting dishes could have no mischief in them. But, though a moderate epicure must needs have been satisfied with Mr. de Lusignan's *ordinaire*, and, though to me it was fare both rare and sumptuous, I thought much less of it than of my guardian himself. His dinner took every unpleasant bitterness, every asperity out of him. He became genial, amusing, and delightful company. His dark eyes looked as mellow and as kind as on the day of our first meeting. His swarthy face was full of fun, and his strongly-marked, expressive features worked in the most ludicrous way imaginable, as he came out with a string of propositions, every one of which was startling, wholly untenable, but withal highly entertaining. Never before had I feasted at a banquet like this. But the Mane, Thecel, Phares of Balthazar, that warning of sorrow which came to the Chaldean king in the midst of his rejoicings on the eve of the night when he was slain, and Darius the Mede succeeded to his kingdom, also comes to us all when we least expect it. We were enjoying ourselves exceedingly; at least, I was only just recovering from a fit of laughter at one of Mr. de Lusignan's stories, when the hand appeared, and wrote, as of old, "on the surface of the wall of the king's palace," words, the meaning of which I, for one, could not decipher.

"I hope you like burgundy," said my guardian; and, after filling my glass to the brim, he raised his, and looked *con amore* at the rich, ruby wine that shone through it, throwing a blood-red dye on the white table-cloth. "Burgundy rules the roast, in my opinion. Claret is a cold-blooded, heartless aristocrat, who pretends to be kind to the consumptive and the dyspeptic, and who is not. A sober hypoerite—a smooth-tongued prime-minister, who will tell you any amount of lies for power and popularity—that's claret. But rich, genial, laughing, merry burgundy is a gay young prince, who flings up his cap, snaps his fingers at the world, and plays out all his pranks before coming into his kingdom. I like him for his honesty, and therefore here's a health and long life to burgundy, say I!"

But I looked at my glass, and did not second my guardian's pledge.

"I have never had any thing to do with burgundy," I said, "and, from the character you give your young prince, sir, I am afraid of him."

"Afraid of burgundy! Fear a lamb! Burgundy is a good-natured, harmless fellow, Bessie; besides, he would surely never hurt such a pretty little thing as you are."

"Don't make the child blush," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, smiling over at me.

It was foolish in me to crimson up at my guardian's civil speech. I might have known that he spoke in jest, or, at least, that he had already drunk some glasses of burgundy, so that the pleasant wine was urging him to say things more kind than true. But I did blush, as Mademoiselle Aubrey saw; and, feeling vexed with myself for doing so, I said, hurriedly:

"I have no doubt that burgundy is a very Phoenix among wines, sir; but still—"

"A what?" interrupted Mr. de Lusignan, as if he had not caught the word.

"Don't!" hurriedly whispered Mademoiselle Aubrey to me across the table; but she spoke too late.

"A very Phoenix of wines," I repeated.

I said no more. The change across Mr. de Lusignan's countenance was so great that it struck me dumb. Life, joy, meaning itself, seemed to pass away from his dark face, leaving it vacant and almost pale; yet he put his glass down with a steady hand, and said, almost slowly:

"A Phoenix of wines, as you say. Now, what would you call it a Phoenix, Bessie?"

I would have given any thing not to answer the question, his look and manner were so altered; but I felt as one mesmerized may feel, if half the tales we hear be true. My will was, as it were, gone from me, and become subject to his. Being thus adjured, I must speak.

"You praised it so much, sir," I said, "that I thought it must be a Phoenix."

"Do not—do not!" entreated Mademoiselle Aubrey. She was looking at us both. I did not know which of us two she addressed thus.

"It is odd how that word will turn up," said Mr. de Lusignan, taking up his glass again. "There is Phoenix Park, in Dublin; there is even a Phoenix Insurance Company somewhere or other."

He paused, as if seeking for some other instance. I suppose I was possessed, for I supplied it:

"A ship, too."

He put down his glass, spilling the wine as he did so; and, casting an imploring look on Mademoiselle Aubrey, he said, in a voice full of anguish:

"Can't you stop her?"

She had no need to do so. I was shocked,

amazed, and frightened. Mademoiselle Aubrey rose, and, taking me by the hand, led me out of the room. Her genial face was white, her blue eyes were dim, and her lip quivered a little; still she was quite calm and self-possessed. I felt I must not question her—that I must not even utter a word of apology or regret for what had just passed. Like one in a dream, I went up with her to the drawing-room.

"Come nigh to the fire," she said; "you look cold. You must have some tea before you go."

I felt not cold, but stunned. It was plain that I had said something dreadful. All unwittingly I had opened the closet in which the owner of this luxurious home, Mr. de Lusignan, who ate such good dinners and talked so pleasantly about his burgundy, kept his skeleton. The door was locked, as he thought, and he had hidden it behind silken hangings and thrown away the key, but, somehow or other, I had uttered a "sesame;" the door had flown open, and the grim tenant within, that bony guest whom my guardian longed to forget, had come forth, and, sitting down among us, converted his little London dinner into an Egyptian banquet. I felt all the more uncomfortable that I could not imagine how I had thus discomposed my guardian, and that there seemed to be no reason why I should not sin again unconsciously.

I had not the chance of doing so—on this evening, at least; we took our tea alone, and when tea was over, Mademoiselle Aubrey saw me home in the carriage. She spoke very little all the way, and said not a word about our meeting when we parted.

"My dear, how early you have come home!" said Mrs. Dawson, wakening from her solitary nap by the parlor-fire.

I felt miserable and still somewhat bewildered, so I sat down, looked at the fire, and said not one word. Besides, I was resolved not to tell Mrs. Dawson what had taken place.

"I hope you enjoyed yourself," she resumed.

I answered that I had not enjoyed myself at all, and, if I spoke as I felt, my tone and look must have been those of an injured person.

"Dear me, was that French mam'selle so unpleasant as all that?" exclaimed Mrs. Dawson, getting lively at the prospect of a little bit of uncharitable gossip.

"Mademoiselle Aubrey is a delightful person," I said, feeling bound to justify her.

There was a pause, then Mrs. Dawson remarked soothingly:

"My dear, you must learn to bear with your guardian's ways—you really must."

"But I am not finding fault with Mr. de Lusignan's ways!" I cried, rather provoked.

"Then, my dear, what do you complain of?"

I felt in a dilemma, for being young, and of an open temper, I had not suspected that a secret is like the keep in a citadel, to be defended by all sorts of outworks. Having been so imprudent as to withdraw all my forces from these, I was now compelled to surrender. I did so helplessly enough.

"Mrs. Dawson, what can there be in the word Phoenix to upset Mr. de Lusignan? He was as pleasant as pleasant can be till that word Phoenix upset him."

"Well, my dear, 'tis no wonder," said Mrs. Dawson, looking grave. "Mr. de Lusignan's only son was lost at sea on board the Phoenix, a year ago."

"Oh! Mrs. Dawson!" I cried, much shocked, "if you had only told me that, I should never have committed such a mistake."

"Well, my dear, no one has cared to speak about that, for, you see, your guardian and his son were not very good friends. The young man would go away somewhere or other, and his father would make him come back, and even insisted that he should return in that very ship the Phoenix, to which the poor young fellow, I am told, had a particular objection—and that's all I know."

All!—surely that was enough! Surely that was a very dreary skeleton which my guardian kept in his closet!

CHAPTER III.

SPRING had come again. I sat alone in Mrs. Dawson's back-parlor, feeling the most miserable of mortals. This year that had gone by had been my first year of sorrow. Care had knocked at my door, and I had not denied myself to this grim visitor, but let him in, perhaps to know what he was like; and once he was within I found I could not turn him out again. He is a tedious visitor, is Care. You may sicken of his company, but he never seems to grow tired of yours. When he has exhausted one subject, he takes up another and begins anew. You are faint and very weary, but Care is fresh and strong. He came early in the morning, perhaps, and yet he holds forth unrelentingly through the hours of the day. Think yourself favored if he lets you go when night is coming at last, and if

you can seek the cold pillow of death, and not have him by your side even then.

Care came to me now, because I no longer saw James Carr. Love for my cousin had grown with my growth. I had early clung to him for the same reason that made him cling to me, because we were of one blood. When I was still a very little girl at Mrs. Dawson's, and James but a lad at school, he would give up a boy's pleasure in the society of other boys, to come and see me whenever he could get a half day's holiday. This he did, not because he loved me, not because he cared for my childish prattle as we sat in Mrs. Dawson's garden, but because I was his little cousin, and we two were alone among strangers on English land. Later, he loved me for my own sake, but that cousinly affection was the beginning, and so it was with me also. I looked up to James Carr as the only one of my kindred whom I knew, the only tie of flesh and blood that I could claim and call mine own. My dead father seemed to look at me again from his blue eyes, and there were echoes of my father's voice in that of my young cousin. I felt a sense of property in him. As he grew into manhood I got proud of his six feet two, of his manly presence, of his handsome face, of his honest look. I knew in my inmost heart that he was not a man of striking abilities; that, spite his Irish blood, the fair gift of fluent and pleasant speech had not been granted to him; but I would have endured any amount of torture rather than confess as much to mortal creature, and such as he was I would have scorned the most fascinating young prince that was ever seen out of the fairy-tales, for his dear sake.

Loving my cousin as I did with all the fervor and the sincerity of youth, though without much of its romance, it was hard not to see him, so hard that I again got quite angry with my guardian about it. My wrath was nursed up and kept warm by the fact that neither he nor his sister-in-law came near me after the unlucky day on which my use of the word Phoenix had led to a scene. Yet Mademoiselle Aubrey had not forgotten me, and, like a good though invisible fairy, she showed her remembrance by her gifts. A week after my visit to Portland Place an able drawing-master called to give me my first lesson.

There is nothing so delightful as a new toy, be the child old or young. I was in raptures with mine; drawing became my mania, and well-nigh superseded music. Beethoven succumbed before Antinous, and no Sonata could vie with the misty charm of water-colors. Indeed, I am not sure that this new love would not have en-

abled me to bear, with tolerable equanimity, the absence of dear James Carr, if the greatest trouble of all had not come to me with the first days of spring, with violets, primroses, and April showers; for then it was that Uncle John died. When earth was adorning herself once more in all her young beauty, when the tide of life was at its fullest, and every created thing was glad of its being, Uncle John, who had long been very weary, sat down one evening to take his last rest, and bade us go on without him. We went, for there is no standing still, no lingering even on that journey; but, oh! how often I looked back! how my heart ached as I looked! and what a great, wide blank the world now seemed to me! Mrs. Dawson was still a good-natured woman, though her brother was gone, but she was also a very dull one, and life, mind, fancy, and imagination, had forsaken the house in Kensington, and left it cold and bare indeed. This culminating sorrow it was that made me feel so miserable on this May morning, that made my pencil flag, and took all beauty from the head of the Pythian Apollo I was attempting to copy. The Pythian Apollo! I remembered how Uncle John had talked of him once, and the recollection smote me with the unconscious pathos which lies in our thoughts of the dead. My heart was full, so very full that my paper was soon blotted with tears, and, recklessly throwing my arms across it, I laid my head down and cried bitterly.

A carriage at the door, a loud double knock, and a "Please, miss, you're wanted," roused me in a second. I believe grief makes one stupid, for it seemed as if I had no alternative but to obey, and enter the front-parlor at once. Perhaps I had a vague hope that it might be James Carr; but of course it was not, and of course it was my guardian.

"Well, Bessie, how are you?" he began; then he stopped short, and stared at me. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed, after a pause, "what is the matter?—what does ail you, child?"

"Uncle John, Mrs. Dawson's brother, is dead," I replied. I could say no more.

Mr. de Lusignan seemed relieved at the intelligence.

"Well, my dear, people must die," he said, a little impatiently. "You don't mean to live forever, do you?"

"No sir," I replied, feeling red and indignant.

"Quite right. Never be eccentric. Society thinks it impertinence; and immortality would assuredly be the greatest piece of eccentricity you or any one else could be guilty of. Well, I

am sorry for your trouble; but I bring news that will cheer you. Mademoiselle Aubrey and I are going to Paris after to-morrow, and you are to come with us."

He expected me to be overjoyed. I was not. Every note in music is sweet, but the note which comes in at the wrong place produces discord. News that would have enchanted me when Uncle John was living, jarred on every fibre of my heart because he was dead. It sounded like treason to leave the land that kept his grave—that poor green grave in which, it seemed to me, he must lie so cold and so forlorn if I went away. So Mr. de Lusignan's proposal touched me not, and I stood cold and mute before him as I heard it.

"I am very sorry this thing does not please you, Bessie," he said, dryly, "because, you see, it must be."

"Are we to be long away, sir?" I asked, still ungracious.

"Three years," he coldly answered.

I stared at him in blank dismay.

"And am I not to see James Carr for three years?" I cried.

My guardian looked much bored.

"My dear, can't you really do without that very tall and red-haired young man for three years?" he asked, remonstratively.

I do not know which exasperated me most, the question or the comment on the color of James Carr's hair; but I know that I answered warmly:

"No, sir, I cannot do three years without knowing how my cousin—my only relation—the only being who cares for me"—this was a hit at Mr. de Lusignan—"is getting on; indeed, I cannot."

"My dear, he is getting on charmingly. I saw him yesterday, and I do believe he has grown since I saw him a year ago. You are worn and thin, but he has thriven upon absence and separation. So be a good girl, and fret no more; for he is filling out *à vue d'œil*, as the French say."

I was stung and mortified, and, bursting into tears, I said very rudely:

"I—I don't believe it;" but I did, every word of it.

Mr. de Lusignan stared again, but shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"My dear child," he remarked, composedly, "you shall have the chance that was given to Thomas of Didymus, for your cousin is to dine with Mrs. Dawson and you to-morrow evening. Only, remember, after to-morrow we go to Paris."

The unexpected concession took me by surprise, and, before I could stammer a few foolish words, Mr. de Lusignan had left me, and I was alone.

This interview revealed to me a most unpleasant fact, a fact, too, of which I had entertained no suspicion, so smooth and even had been my life till then—I had a temper. I felt ashamed and vexed, and thought it was that shame and vexation which made me sit down and cry when the street-door closed on my guardian; but it was not, and when these troubled waters grew still, and I could see down through their depths, I knew well enough what ailed me. The thought that James Carr had taken our separation so easily, ay, and thriven upon it, as Mr. de Lusignan averred, was too much for me. While I had been foolishly longing for the look of his eye, and the sound of his voice, James Carr had been devoting himself to agriculture, taking care of his little red-haired step-sisters, doing all sorts of good things, but certainly not fretting for me. The pride of eighteen summers rose in arms at the thought. I dried my tears; I went up to my room, began my packing forthwith, and nursed dire plans for revenge the while. James Carr was coming to-morrow, was he? Well, then, I would be cool to James Carr. I would show no regret at parting from him, and I would show great, not to say ecstatic delight at the prospect of visiting Paris. Still I would be condescending and kind. I would promise to write now and then, *when I had time*; and I would show my magnanimity and my indifference—feelings that are nearer of kin than the world suspects—by talking freely to James Carr of those three little red-haired Molochs, whom I knew he set above me; and even of that odious Dick Smith, whose praises he was ever singing in my wearied ears in the days when we used to meet. To these stern resolves I determined to adhere; and if I did not, it was all owing to Mrs. Dawson.

My going away was a cruel blow to the poor lady.

"What shall I do without you?" she cried, clasping her helpless hands. "And then it will make such a difference at the end of the year!"

And what between the loss of my society and the difference to her income, Mrs. Dawson sat down and cried. I could not help crying for company. Surely never was journey to the gayest of cities watered by so many tears.

"And then your cousin coming to dine to-morrow!" she resumed, incoherently. "Bessie, what shall I do?"

"Oh! don't let that be a trouble, dear Mrs.

Dawson," I said, eagerly. "You may give him any thing to eat. James is not at all hard to please. Any thing will do, provided there is enough of it," I added, as a vivid remembrance of a boyish James and a cold leg of mutton flashed across my mind.

"My dear, that is not it, but Mr. Carr is really so—so stern, and poor dear John's loss has made me feel so low."

James stern! James, whom I had not seen for a twelvemonth, from whom I was going to be separated for three years, an object of terror to Mrs. Dawson! In a moment I veered round to him, and all my little resentful schemes for his annoyance were swept away from my mind.

What a fever of expectation I was in for the whole of the next day! The moment I heard his knock at the door I ran out of the parlor, in my eager joy, and opened to him, without waiting till Mary should come up from the kitchen. Yet even in that first moment, when he stood on the threshold, his stately figure darkening the sunlit street behind him, I saw, with a shock of unpleasant surprise, that the sign of the lion was in the ascendant. A second look also told me that James was in robust health, a florid, handsome, tall, and broad-shouldered young fellow, to whom fretting was unknown. My little plans for revenge came back, but I had no time to indulge in them. Though I had adorned myself, and tried to look my best, it availed me not—James caught my hand, and looked down anxiously in my face.

"Bessie, have you been ill?" he asked, un- easily.

"No, not ill, James; but—but I have not been quite well either."

We entered the parlor together. James, dear old fellow, was no great reader, but he had always been pleased that I should read, and grow learned, as he termed it. There was no littleness in James Carr's mind. The only fault he had to find with books was that they would get out of book-cases, and make a confusion—"a mess," said James, "on tables." I knew this, also, that straightness in all things was dear to James; so my first act on entering the parlor, was to put back in its place a flower-stand which I had partly removed from the window, in order to watch for his coming.

"What is that for, Bessie?" he inquired, a little sharply.

"Why do you ask?" I said, tartly, for I would not tell him my true reason.

James tightened his lips, and knit his brows. In some trepidation, I inquired after his sisters,

James thanked me dryly—his sisters were very well.

"And how is Mr. Smith?" I asked, bent on conciliation. "Has he married his cousin yet?"

"His cousin ran away with her music-master a month ago," replied James, and he began to whistle softly.

Sailors have an objection to whistling. It brings on foul weather, they say. I knew of old that, when James whistled, some storm or other was coming on. He had sat down in Uncle John's old crimson chair, and he stared at the flower-stand in the window without minding me. I stood before him much perplexed. I knew not yet how to read the story of his straight brows and set features.

"And how does Mr. Smith take this?" I asked, at random.

"He drowned himself last Tuesday fortnight," answered James, grimly.

Verily this was drifting from Charybdis into Scylla. I felt very much shocked. I had seen that Mr. Smith once. A great, uncouth fellow he was, and James had brought him to me as he had brought me his sisters—as he had brought me his white mice when he was a boy—as he would have brought me a bear, had he but had one. I knew not what to say, for James was whistling again. Luckily, Mrs. Dawson, who was under strict orders not to leave us alone, now entered the room in a flutter. I took care not to say thing about Mr. Smith, but let her and James manage the conversation as they pleased, till we sat down to dinner.

Mrs. Dawson had done her best, and the dinner was a good one. James brought to it that best of all sauces, the Lacedemonian. I was pleased to see him display such a hearty appetite. Uncle John had always spoken of Homer's heroes as being vigorous eaters, and I liked to find this analogy at least between my young Celt and these old Greeks. I have already said that James was not what is called a good talker; but people who care for each other also take pleasure in each other's discourse, and when James told me all he was planning and doing in Yorkshire, I found him quite eloquent.

"I have had the bricklayers," he said, pausing in the act of helping me to some fowl.

"Have you? What for, James?"

"The last gale of wind knocked down all the chimney-stacks—did not leave one standing."

"How provoking! And bricklayers' wages are so high, are they not?"

James looked straight at me.

"How do you want a man with a wife and

seven children to live if he does not get what you call high wages?" he asked.

I felt snubbed, but I was used to it, and did not answer.

"I have had the gardener too," resumed James—"a good deal more expensive than poor wretched bricklayers, Bessie."

I really thought this second snubbing superfluous; but Mrs. Dawson was present, and I would not rebel. I asked humbly enough what the gardener had been doing for James.

"For the garden, you mean?" Another snubbing. "Why, not much. I shall go in for roses chiefly. You like roses?"

This mollified me at once; besides, this homely discourse of James had its charm. When you are to live in a house you take an interest in the repairing of its chimney-stacks; when a garden is to be yours, it is pleasant to hear that it is to be full of roses. I believe I looked kindly at James across the table; for though he sat with his back to the light, I saw a rapid flush of pleasure pass across his handsome face. He had none of the poetry of the Irish race, but he had all its sensitiveness. Unluckily he was touchy, too, and sadly quick to take offence. Just then, however, he was softened, as I was soothed. These roses that were going to blow in his garden, and fill it with fragrance, were roses of good-will to us both.

Mrs. Dawson marred all. She was a sleepy sort of woman. She lived in a dream, and got the echoes rather than the sounds of the outward world. This gave her a trick of answering speeches that had been made ten minutes; and now, remembering that her two servants had struck for higher salaries, she said, most inopportunately:

"Wages are high; but what can one expect, Mr. Carr, from such a government as that we have got?"

It was Mrs. Dawson's habit when she was put out—and my going away put her out sadly—to sit on the opposition benches and abuse Government. She was one of the tribe who must blame some one for their troubles; and, being too good-natured to lay the burden on the shoulders of her neighbor, she took those of Government, whom she looked upon, I believe, as a sturdy, broad-backed old sinner. Mr. Carr stared on being thus addressed. He was, as I have said, a great disciplinarian. I doubt if he had any political opinions; but Government, Whig or Tory, he revered. He scorned to argue with Mrs. Dawson, for, though he was not a man of brilliant parts himself, he knew well enough a weak mind

from a strong one; but he gave me a keen, searching look. I saw very well that he thought me a rebel at heart; and, worse still, a suggester of rebellious sentiments in others. He had got one of his strange crotchets in his head, and for once I was quite angry with him. All the roses that ever blew could do us no good now.

A fine chill, drizzling rain fell down as night set in. Mrs. Dawson had a fire in the front-parlor. I played and sang some of the old Irish melodies for James, who had asked me. The music softened me a little—besides, were we not to part on the morrow for three years? When I came back to the fireside, there were tears in my eyes. James did not see them—he was looking moodily at the fire; while Mrs. Dawson valiantly struggled against sleep in her chair. But Sleep, calling in the heat of the fire to his aid, soon had the best of the battle. Her eyelids quivered, then closed; her head sank on her breast, then fell gently back; then came a snore, to tell us that sleep had prevailed, and which sounded like that flourish of trumpets with which the conqueror proclaims his victory in the old dramas.

James was still looking at the fire. What was he thinking of? The contraction of his straight brows, and the twitchings of his mobile lips, told me that his thoughts were not pleasant, but told me no more. On hearing Mrs. Dawson's snore, he looked up, and staring hard at me he said—

"I hate Frenchmen!"

"Do you?" I said, not knowing what else to say.

"I saw one flogging his horse at Boulogne. I should have liked to have the flogging of him."

James looked terribly in earnest. I had always been afraid of him. I felt that old fear which had slept during the year of our separation creeping round my very heart again. I coughed gently, hoping to awaken Mrs. Dawson; but I did not; and the worst was that James detected me, and was down upon me in a moment.

"Are we too much alone for your liking, Bessie?" he asked, with such grim suspicion in his blue eyes that I could only color up and look as I felt—conscious and guilty. "You are glad to go—I know you are," he said, working himself up to an unreasonable wrath, which waxed all the hotter that he had to speak low, for fear of waking Mrs. Dawson.

"I have no voice in the matter, as you know, James; and, surely, you would not have me rebel against my guardian?"

"I don't tell you to rebel. I only say you are glad to go."

I scorned to deny. James whistled a little while.

"Shall I tell you why I hate Frenchmen?" he said, suddenly leaving off his whistling in order to look hard at me; "why, because I know they will all be running after you."

His manner had made me nervous, and I did not know now whether to laugh or cry at this vision of the manhood of France pursuing my poor little unlucky self. I thought it best to laugh.

"Thank you, James," I said.

"Don't laugh, Bessie, this is no laughing matter. Dick Smith went and drowned himself, but he followed his cousin and her music-master first, and perhaps it is well that he did not overtake them."

Again James knit his brows, and again his lips twitched nervously.

"James, what ails you?" I asked, under my breath—"what can ail you?"

"Yes," he answered, "I never knew it till Dick drowned himself because that girl jilted him; but I know it now—I know it now," he added, looking at me with eyes in which the tenderness of his old love and the fierceness of this new feeling, blended strangely.

I felt myself turning sick with fear. All this was very new, very terrible to me. A West-Indian tornado suddenly bursting over our tranquil land could scarcely have terrified me more than to see matter-of-fact James Carr turned into a wrathful Othello.

"James," I said, laying my hand on his arm, and speaking soothingly, "surely you know me?"

He did not heed me.

"It has not got out of my head since Dick drowned himself," he said, in that grim, low voice which terrified me so. "How long do you think I have been in London, Bessie?—ten days. And what have I been doing?—walking up and down this terrace. Who lives in the house opposite this, Bessie?"

"O James, don't be ridiculous. They are all old maids."

"Yes; but there is a fellow who goes there, and who stares at these windows. I have seen him, Bessie, so you can't deny it."

"James!"

"And there's the flower-stand. Why are you always changing it from one side of the window to the other? Is it a signal? Does it mean, 'I am going out to-day,' or, 'The coast is clear,' or, 'We'll have better luck to-morrow?' Why did

you run to that flower-stand the moment I came in?"

An older woman than I was would have told James that he was mad, or that he insulted her. I said nothing, but stared very pitifully at him, no doubt, for, in a moment, he looked another man, and, snatching my hand, he cried:

"O Bessie, my darling, don't mind me—don't! I am a beast—I am! But you don't know what I have gone through since Dick Smith drowned himself."

It would have been a good thing for us both if I could have given James a good scolding just then. He would have taken it as meekly as he took little Polly's kicks and cuffs, and all might have been right once more; but he had spoken loud, and Mrs. Dawson woke up with a start.

"The flower-stand," she said, winking at us, to show that she was wide awake. "Yes, Bessie will change it about so. It injures the flowers, Mr. Carr."

I should have liked to shake Mrs. Dawson, I felt so angry. Why had she gone to sleep at the wrong time, and wakened up at the wrong time; and why was she so very stupid? Mr. Carr gave me an odd look; but what could I say? Soon after this he said it was late, and he rose to go. We parted kindly enough. The three years that were to divide us softened away every bitterness. Dear James Carr! When I went with him to the door, and we both stood there on the threshold, hand-in-hand, looking out into the chill, misty night, I fancy we both felt all the old tenderness of our childhood and our youth welling back into our hearts.

"Well, I *must* go," he said, with a sigh. He stooped and kissed me twice; then he hurried away, and I stood listening to his quick, firm step as he went down the terrace, feeling all forlorn. Mrs. Dawson, who had considerably remained in the parlor, said, with a pitiful sigh, as I reëntered it:

"And so you are going away to-morrow, Bessie? But why do you change that flower-stand so? I really think it injures the flowers."

A great, guilty throb of joy shot through my heart as I heard her. Yes, I was going away to-morrow, and James Carr, who, poor fellow! was now prowling outside, as he wrote to me later, having come back in the darkness to watch for my shadow on the window-blind—James Carr could not follow me. I was going for three years, far from those terrible looks which made me sick with fear—far from that fierce, jealous love which had suddenly become so awful a bondage.

But scarcely had these thoughts passed through me when I drew back from them like one scared. Like a coward, too, I denied them. I was not glad to go—I was not afraid of James Carr, and boldly I declared to my heart, "You have said that which is not true."

CHAPTER IV.

It is not in youth that we feel the bitterness of separation. Later we know that to part often means to meet never again in this world; and, knowing this, we cannot leave the friend we love, the land we live in, the dwelling, even, that has sheltered us, without a keen pang of regret. But in youth we know nothing of all this. With eager hand we turn the pages of the great book of life, unconscious that we are rarely allowed to read the same page a second time. And so youth is often thought heartless when it is only hopeful.

When I bade Mrs. Dawson adieu, the next morning, I was very sorry, but with the light sorrow of a young girl before whom lies a bright pleasure-journey. Little did I think that the first chapter in the story of my life was closed, to be reopened no more—that never again should I see that kind face, never again enter that friendly dwelling.

"I shall only be three years away," I said to her, trying to be cheerful; "and, when we come back, you know, I am to come and see you once a week, at least."

Yes, we had made that compact; for Mrs. Dawson was still as young as myself in some things. Once a week, indeed! Alas! before six months were over, Mrs. Dawson had gone and joined her only remaining brother in Australia; and thus she and Uncle John vanished from my life—one in the grave, the other in a distant country, and the little home which had once bound us was broken, and its household gods scattered far and wide. But I was to be "only three years away," as I had told Mrs. Dawson, and I did not even dream of the things which were to come to pass before six months were over.

When I reached the house in Portland Place, that Aladdin's palace, as I had always called it to myself, it looked as stripped and bare as if the African enchanter had uttered some evil spell upon it. The costly furniture was gone, the stately rooms were empty, dust lay on the uncarpeted floors, and, if I had seen a spider weaving its web in the gilded cornices, I should

not have wondered much. I only caught a glimpse of this desecrated dwelling. My guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey were ready; a woman was waiting to receive the keys. There was nothing to do but to go away. We drove off to the station at once; the train was ready to start; we flew, as it seemed to me, through a green landscape dotted with towns and villages; then came the sea, with its blue billows toying in the sunlight forever and ever away; and, after a calm passage, there was more railway rushing through a darkening land, till the lights and subdued roar of a city were around us. We were in Paris.

I suppose there cannot be many sensations in life more delightful than that of wakening in Paris for the first time at the age of eighteen. But when the morning is a bright spring morning, when your room is one of the most comfortable in the Hôtel Meyerbeer, and you need only look out of your window to get a radiant glimpse of the Champs Elysées, with trees, flowers, and plashing fountains dancing in the sun, delight becomes rapture.

Uncle John had spent some years of his youth in this siren of modern cities, and he had told me a good deal about her, especially as beheld through the dim splendor of the past. My young head had got full of some odd fancies, in which chronology was little regarded, and topography ignored. I gathered in a cluster the Bastille and Notre-Dame, the Seine and the Boulevards. Of Anne of Austria, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Marie Antoinette, Henri Quatre, Napoleon, and Robespierre, I made a group, and the figures flitted through my brain stately, sorrowful, tragic, or gay, but quite as real to me as the living men and women in the street below. I thought Mademoiselle Aubrey would never be up and dressed this morning; and, when I at length entered her room, I was in a fever of excitement.

"Oh! mademoiselle," I cried, breathlessly, "do you know where we go to-day? Shall we see the Bastille, or the Tuileries, or Cours la Reine?"

"My goodness!" she interrupted. "What is the matter, my dear child? The Bastille! Why, that has been pulled down ages. The Tuileries are no great distance" (alas! there were Tuileries then!), "and Cours la Reine is close by. But what can you want with that dullest of dull walks?"

"Uncle John told me that Anne of Austria used to go there."

"Uncle John! Have you got an uncle?"

"Oh! no, but—" Here I broke down, as the calm, tender face of the dead, that dear face which slept forever beneath the green sod, came back to me, with its thoughtful look and its faded smile.

It was one of Mademoiselle Aubrey's gifts that she had kept, spite the sad wisdom which comes with years, all the quick sensitiveness of youth. In a moment her eyes were dim, and her lip quivered.

"My dear, I am sorry, very sorry," she said, kindly laying her hand upon my arm. "We two shall go wherever you like," she added; "but you must let Mr. de Lusignan have his way first."

Mr. de Lusignan's way and mine happened to be divergent paths. Mr. de Lusignan was no longer at the time of life when the past is lovely as a fairy-tale. Mr. de Lusignan did not care a rush for Henri Quatre, and yawned over Mademoiselle de la Vallière; besides, Mr. de Lusignan was a man of the world, who half hated, half laughed at history. He spared not the living actors, and held in scant pity or esteem the sorrowful and illustrious dead, who once had trod that tragic stage. They bored him excessively, I believe, and no doubt I bored him too, with my ardor, and enthusiasm, and insatiable curiosity, for he railed at me unmercifully, and whenever I wanted to poke my nose into some odd, out-of-the-way historical corner, he invariably said, "Let us go to the Palais Royal."

Alas for the weakness of the flesh! I could never resist that bait. Oh! most fascinating of palaces! rare combination of shops and royalty, who that has lingered in your galleries at night, when you glittered with the light of a thousand gas-stars, can forget you, and not lament your fate? Infinite variety was your charm, perpetual gayety and good-humor your characteristic. I never entered you without a throb of joy at my heart. I never left you without a sigh of regret. And, though my guardian had neither throb nor sigh to give you, he liked you well. He was a man of to-day; he liked the *cafés*, the living crowd, the unflagging gayety of Paris, just as he hated gloom, sorrow, and funerals.

Thanks to Mademoiselle Aubrey, I saw something besides the Palais Royal. I had taken pains to get into her favor. Years and experience had taught her a certain coldness; I saw it, but I was bent on winning her liking, and this is an attempt in which the young rarely fail. Mademoiselle Aubrey, though wise, had three weak points—her chocolate in the morning, her footstool in the afternoon, and her book in the even-

ing. By attending to these, I won her heart, as I learned when she dropped the formal Miss Carr one morning, and gayly called me "Mignonne." Mr. de Lusignan took up the name, and I ceased to be Bessie Carr for either of them from that day forth. I believe that he too liked me, in his capricious way; but it was a trying way at the best.

We had been three weeks in Paris, when my guardian suddenly said to us, one morning—

"I think we shall go to Fontainebleau now."

This was at breakfast. Mademoiselle Aubrey put down her cup, and looked at him very earnestly.

"To Fontainebleau?" she repeated.

"Yes," he carelessly answered, "we have exhausted Paris. We shall spend the summer there."

Exhausted Paris!—but that was his way. He neither consulted us, nor asked how we liked the plan. In this, as in all else, his pleasure was his law. Well, Paris was enchanting, but Fontainebleau was attractive too. Uncle John had told me about it. Was there not a palace there?—a palace and a forest, the basis of every fairy tale, and, though I was eighteen, it was not so very long ago since the fairy tales and I had been fast friends.

Mr. de Lusignan's fancies never admitted of delay, so we got ready at once, and left Paris in the afternoon of the following day.

When we got down at the station, the setting sun was firing a vast horizon of wooded hills. I saw the forest in that burning glow, with its waves of golden green climbing up rocks, and meeting the blue sky.

A carriage soon took us to Fontainebleau. I liked the look of the place, with its long, clean streets, low, white houses, and large gardens, full of tall trees that nodded at us over high walls; and when the carriage reached the large furnished house which Mr. de Lusignan had secured in Paris, by that talisman, a well filled purse, I uttered a cry of delight on seeing the old gateway which opened to let us in, for it was gray with stone, red with brick, and it wore a heavy coronal of bright young green creepers drooping above its ancient head.

"And do we really live here?" I cried, "and is that beautiful old gate ours? I must draw it—I really must. Penn's gray and vermilion, and a little burnt Sienna."

"Do not fall in love with the gate, Mignonne," interrupted my guardian. "You know I forbid the banns until you are twenty-one."

"Is this not the gate of Gabrielle D'Estrées?"

asked Mademoiselle Aubrey, as we alighted at the *perron*.

"The very same," he answered. "Of course Miss Carr's historical studies have made her familiar with the name of that lady."

He was mystifying me, but I was so surprised to find that both he and Mademoiselle Aubrey knew this place familiarly, that I asked, absently, who this Madame Gabrielle had been.

"Oh! no great things.—See to that luggage, Louis." Mr. de Lusignan had a courier, who was a wonderful man; silent, but marvellously efficient—a sort of genie I thought him. "There are plenty more similar memorials of such illustrious French ladies about here," he resumed, addressing me as we now stood in the hall. "We have got the Avenues la Vallière, Montespain, and Maintenon. This very stately, these cool and shady. Is there not, too, the Route de Pompadour?"

"I have heard about Madame de Maintenon and the carps," I said, rather eagerly; "and how, as she fed them, she compared her lot with theirs, and said they too would like to go back again to their mud! And some of those carps are alive still, but quite old and hoary; and they wear gold rings or collars, I can't remember which."

"Can't you?—happy child not to know that the oldest carps could not remember the first Napoleon, and were born long after he bade his guard adieu from the head of the grand *escalier d'honneur*. Ah! what would I not give to believe in carps, and gold rings, and the rest of it?"

"But the carps are old, and they do wear gold collars," I persisted, reluctant to give up my story. "I have read it in a book."

"And it is time to dress for dinner," said Mr. de Lusignan, looking at his watch.

A bright-eyed, pert-looking servant-girl, who had been hired with the house, I suppose, showed us up to our rooms. Mademoiselle Aubrey, who was the neatest and tidiest of old maids, at once began unpacking; but I was a young maid yet, so, giving a look at my room, which was comfortable and commonplace, and leaving my crushed dresses to their fate, I flew to the window. A flagged terrace, with formal stone vases full of scarlet geraniums, and a sweep of gravel path, shaded by the trees of the grounds, which, to my inexperienced eyes, looked extensive, and the old gate, beneath which that gay Henri Quatre had bowed the white plume of his helmet as he rode in to see his fair Gabrielle—I have learned her story since then—were my prospect. I thought it enchanting. Was I not in Fon-

tainebleau, one of the world's wonders?—and was I not going to transfer that charming old gate to the still virgin page of my sketch-book, and to see an historical palace, and to wander in a prehistorical forest?

What youth did for me, his dinner did for Mr. de Lusignan. It was a good dinner, and by the time he had dispatched his little French dishes, and his bottle of burgundy, my guardian became quite genial. His brown eye got mellow, he leaned back in his chair, and laughed at me and my enthusiasm as he sipped his wine.

"Well, but you, too, like Fontainebleau?" I retorted.

"How do you know that I do, Mignonne?"

"Well, you have been here before; and if—"

"How do you know that I have been here before?—who told you so?" he asked, with a sudden change of look and tone that half frightened me. "Ah! to be sure," he added, recovering quickly—"I let it out myself. Yes, as you say, I have been here before; and I shall have the honor"—he was quite rude and sarcastic now—"to be Miss Carr's guide over the palace to-morrow."

If any thing could have damped my ardor, my guardian's uncertain temper would have done so. But unpleasant impressions do not last at eighteen. The word palace evoked some delightful visions, on which I went to sleep that night, and which the morrow amply fulfilled.

Oh! what a grand old song is that of Time!—awful, sublime, and lamentable by turns, and never-ceasing. How it goes on throughout ages, now triumphant as a jubilee, now plaintive as a tale of wrong, but still endless! Is there not something magnificent, and yet wearisome, like the perpetual moaning of the sea, in those full tones which rise from the earth, proclaiming the beauty and the glory of creation, and telling ever, and again and again, man's strange and eventful story to his God? From green and ancient forests, from ruins basking in the sunshine, from cities and palaces it comes, evermore calling itself legend, tradition, or history, and lulling the ear of generations with its monotonous chant.

But that song has not lost its freshness when we are young, for then the whole world is still as a splendid show; and a rare old place did Fontainebleau seem to me. I was half wild with admiration and delight as we crossed the wide court-yards, and went through the stately rooms, and over the beautiful gardens of that rendezvous of palaces, as it has been called. For Fontainebleau is like the oak in its own forest. It

was first an acorn, then a sapling, then a mighty tree, no longer reckoning time by years, but by centuries. When it was a hunting-lodge, Saint Thomas à Becket consecrated its little chapel in which, seven hundred years later, the captive Pius VII. said mass. Here kings died, and other kings were born, and royal heirs received their foreign brides, and men and women of tragic fame left many a token behind them. We were shown the armor in which Monaldeschi was murdered, at the behest of that stern Christina of Sweden, who could give up a kingdom, but could not relinquish her revenge; the bed in which Marie Antoinette had slept, and the delicate iron-work which Louis XVI. forged for the window of her bedroom.

"These graceful leaves do not tell us of Fate, do they, Mignonne!" asked Mr. de Lusignan. "We shall come to something more significant presently."

And so we did; for, when we were shown the little mahogany table on which Napoleon signed his abdication, Mr. de Lusignan pointed out to me the half-effaced stab of the penknife which the conquered conqueror of Europe gave the harmless wood in his wrath.

"We will leave the carps and the gardens for another day," said my guardian, looking at his watch. "This morning we will have a drive in the forest."

I had had a glimpse of Welsh mountains as a little child, and I remembered wandering by the sea-shore, and hearing the great sounding waves dash over the rocks, and come beating up the beach, but I had never been in a forest before this day. For the first time I saw mighty oaks and beeches, over whose green heads ages had passed, leaving them verdant still; for the first time I went along those avenues across which streaks of sunshine played, and which stretched miles away, till they closed in a vista of golden light; and for the first time, too, the solemn gloom of those vast boughs, beneath whose shadow grew another forest of cool green ferns, tall, stately, and motionless, sheltered there alike from storm or sunshine, became revealed to me.

I was nearly beside myself with delight. Mr. de Lusignan leaned back in the carriage, folded his arms, and looked at me keenly from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"Enjoy yourself, Mignonne," he said, kindly. "Look at that tree," he added, as we reached an open space, in the centre of which rose a stately gnarled oak, which a recent thunder-storm had blasted, "that is the Charlemagne—no, I mistake, the Pharamond."

"Have all these trees names?" I asked.

"To be sure they have. The whole forest belongs, not to the crown, as you might imagine, but to an old soldier, who came here to live on a small competence, and to take that rest which we all long for, seldom reach, and more seldom enjoy. This retired sergeant was a man of impassioned mind and ardent heart. These mighty trees, growing in forest-rows, or scattered among rocks, woke in him the love of a lover, and the raptures of a poet. He took possession of them. This oak he called Pharamond, that beech he named Alexandre Dumas; and so, toying with literature and history, he peopled this ancient forest with the dead and the living, and made it his own. And this was not enough for him. That the whole world might see and worship the beauty of his darlings, he made paths among the rocks—heaven knows at what toil and cost!—and he wandered up and down the forest, followed by a man with a brush, and a pot of blue paint, who left significant blue arrows behind him, arrows which, like Ariadne's clew, lead you along this vast labyrinth, and make it hard to go astray. Happy man! Think what a life his has been! To discover a grotto, or dig out a new rock—to call this tree *La Reine Blanche*, or this mighty mass of stone the *Eagle's Eyrie*! And then the zeal of the man. If it were not that I so detest tourists, we should have joined his caravan, *Mignon*, for he has one every week. He goes about with a band of strangers, whom he has never seen, and may never see again, and explores with them the forest or the rocks, as the case may be; and, when the time allotted for the excursion is over, he blows a blast on his horn, like Roland at Roncevaux, and calls them all in to return to Fontainebleau in the gloaming, for all of which he does not receive one farthing. Now just tell me, *Mignon*, if Monsieur Dene-court is not a man to be envied?"

Many are the dreams of bliss which haunt the heart of eighteen; but I doubt if to give time, labor, and money to rocks and trees be one. I suppose I started and looked perplexed, for Mr. de Lusignan, who was in one of his talkative moods, enlightened me as to his exact meaning.

"You see, *Mignon*," he said, "I consider the having of a hobby supreme bliss. There is nothing like it in life. Still, as there is a choice in steeds, I like your pure, thorough-bred a great deal better than your worn-out hack. So I envy Monsieur Dene-court, and, after him, yonder landscape-painter."

We were leaving the shade of the forest, and our road now passed through savage rocks, among

which grew oaks and beeches of huge size and stately beauty. Ferns and moss abounded here; and surely, though none were visible, many wild things must have made their lair in this solitude. A young painter sat at his easel by the road-side, the only living creature besides ourselves. He was painting an old oak, with a hollow trunk and broad, green boughs. He smoked a cigar as he painted, and looked the happiest of men, with a big black dog lying on the ground by his side.

"Now, there's a life for you!" said my guardian, as we drove on and left the painter behind us. "He goes off in the morning with his traps on his back, and he spends the day in beautiful places; and, when he goes home at night, and sleeps the sound sleep of youth, why, he dreams of fame, and he is a Claude, or a Poussin, or a Gainsborough, or a Turner, as his proclivities may be. Ah! if it were not for winter, a landscape-painter would be the happiest of men.—And here's another of their tribe; and there's another feature of the happiness of the race."

I heard a jingling of bells, and, looking round, I saw a little donkey-cart coming toward us. In it sat a gray-bearded man, in a slouched hat and a loose velvet jacket, and by his side a little maiden with golden curls, who wore a scarlet cloak and hood. It was she who held the reins; she laughed as she shook them with a great jingling of the bells, and the little donkey, who looked a spirited donkey, put himself on his mettle, and began galloping at a great speed, and had soon passed us. I do not know which of the two looked in greater glee—the gray-bearded man or the child.

"Now, there it is," said Mr. de Lusignan, with a sigh of mock envy. "That man, because he is a painter, can scout civilization and its bonds. He can wear a velvet jacket, and ride in a donkey-cart.—Well, where are we now?"

"This is the *dormoir* of Lantara," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey.

The spot was a beautiful spot. A little flat bit of table-land, with grand old trees casting their broad shadow upon it, and around it a wilderness of rock and fern. A road went hard by, and there was a sign-board, too, yet the place looked as wild and lonely a place as you need wish to see. We alighted, and Mademoiselle Aubrey at once went to a low, flat rock, and sat down upon it.

"This is the *dormoir* of Lantara," she said again.

"That's the other side of the picture," said my guardian. "This Lantara was a cowherd,

who used to mind his cows here a hundred years ago or so. How from a cowherd he became a famous landscape-painter is more than I can tell you; but famous he was in his day, though he died in a hospital. Granted that he paid dear for such genius and fame as he had, I dare say he would have thought them worth the cost. It is something to lie on that stone, Mignonne, and see the misty breath of the morning fade away from a scene like this, or to watch the slanting rays of the setting sun passing through the foliage of these grand old trees, and to feel within one's self the power of putting it all on canvas. And now, Mignonne, you may go back to Mademoiselle Aubrey, if you like, for I am going to smoke a cigar."

I turned back, and found Mademoiselle Aubrey still sitting as we had left her. Her head was bent, her hands were clasped, and she was moaning, "Oh! my darling! my darling!" in tones so full of sorrow that I stood still before her, and looked at her in great dismay. She raised her tear-stained face, and said in a broken voice:

"Do not mind it, Mignonne. Do not speak about it."

So I stood there till the passion of her grief was over, and she rose once more, calm and composed. Mr. de Lusignan threw away his cigar before it was half out, and came back to us.

"Shall we go home now, and leave the Brigand's Cave for another time?" he asked.

He evidently expected me to say, "As you please;" but the words "Brigand's Cave" had fired my imagination.

"Oh! do let us see it to-day!" I cried.

Mademoiselle Aubrey, ever kind and considerate, remarked:

"Yes, Mignonne will like it."

My guardian looked very cross—he evidently wanted to go home. I suppose my fate was on me, for I again said, quite boldly:

"Since you let me choose, I shall like it to be to-day, sir."

"Oh! you will like it to be to-day," he said, in his sarcastic way; but he yielded, though with a very ill grace.

I had my wish—a girl's wish, no more; but I have often wondered what my future lot would have been if that wish had been denied—what other joys and sorrows than those I went through I should have known.

CHAPTER V.

"WILL monsieur have any vipers?" said a shrill, boyish voice, close to us. "They are the real Fontainebleau vipers, and not dear. I have also got the green lizards."

Mr. de Lusignan, who looked extremely cross at my decision, turned sharply round on the speaker, a very ragged boy, with a sunburnt face and restless, gypsy eyes. He was barefooted and bareheaded—as wild-looking an urchin as I had ever beheld. He carried a deal box with a glass cover, through which I saw, on one side, the little dark vipers lying very quiet; and on the other a gorgeous green lizard, so strangely beautiful that I uttered an exclamation of admiration and delight.

"Do your vipers bite?" asked Mr. de Lusignan, in a bantering tone.

A very cunning look came to the boy's black eyes.

"They do not want to bite, monsieur," he answered. "They are very quiet, as you see."

"How do you get them?"

"I go and look for them with my uncle—he charms them."

"Do you charm vipers, too?"

"No; but I hope to do so soon."

He said it greedily, as if the charming of vipers were the height of bliss.

"Can you read or write?"

"No," with profound indifference.

"Would you like to?"

The boy laughed.

"Would you like to be prenticed to some trade?"

The boy laughed again.

"I should run away."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! I have run away twice."

He stood before us as he made the confession, half naked, his unkempt hair falling round his freckled face, tanned with sun and wind—a young savage in feeling as in look; but with a wild grace in his bearing that struck me.

"Look at him," said my guardian to us, in English—"a red Indian is not wilder in his heart than this boy. Give him the forest to roam in, vipers to snare, and travellers to fleece now and then, and what are shoes and stockings, and civilization and its ways, to him? There," he added, throwing him a franc, which the boy caught in the air, "take these ladies through the gorges, and bring them out Barbison way.—I shall be there with the carriage," he added, turning to Mademoiselle Aubrey; and having got rid

of our society for an hour, he took out another cigar.

"Of course you know the way?" he called out to our guide, as we went up the path.

The boy thrust forth his nether lip derisively.

"Oh, yes! he knew the way," he said.

"Do not forget to show the ladies the Brig-and's Cave," continued my guardian.

The boy paused, and a dark look came across his face.

"The other boy is there," he said.

"Oh, I suppose the Cave belongs to the other boy. Are you not friends?" shrewdly added Mr. de Lusignan.

"What right has he to the vipers more than I have?" the lad said, angrily. "Do they not belong to whomsoever can catch them?"

"Most true. Well, at all events, take the ladies to the Cave, and try to have no battle about the vipers to-day.—Poor little vipers," I heard him soliloquizing, as he lit his cigar, "must they, too, be a bone of contention in this quarrelsome world?"

The time I spent in Fontainebleau was a very memorable time for me, and hence, perhaps, no spot that I have seen has left traces so deep in my mind as this. I seem to know its rocks and trees, as if they had been familiar to me from childhood upward. Its scenery is as vivid before me as if I had beheld it yesterday.

How hot the sun was as we passed through those savage gorges!—how weird and gray looked those huge rocks!—how slippery were the glittering pine-needles that carpeted the earth beneath our feet! Mademoiselle Aubrey soon got tired. She sat down to rest on a ledge of rock in the shade. A pine-tree waved its dark branches above us; the tall bracken fern grew around us in a forest, the very air was still; there were no sight-seers out, bright though the day was, and the silence of the place was almost oppressive. Mademoiselle Aubrey got into a conversation with our little guide. She, too, drew him out, but not as Mr. de Lusignan had drawn him; under her light and tender hand some gentle traits came forth. This young savage was an orphan, but he had a little sister, and his look softened as he spoke of her. She was so little, and she had such red cheeks, he said; her name was Belle. She had not been christened Belle, but that was her name. He stood leaning against a rock, with his box of reptiles lying at his feet. His look and attitude, his ragged garments, the rock behind him, and a graceful tuft of ferns in a deep dark crevice, made so pretty a picture that I took out a little sketch-book from my pocket

and asked him to stay quiet awhile. On this suggestion the brother vanished at once, and the commercial man came out.

"How much will you give me?" he asked.

I showed him a penny. He laughed scornfully in my face, and displayed his five fingers in so significant a manner, that I laughed too.

"Very well," I replied; "I shall give you five."

"Five big ones," he said, emphatically.

I agreed to the five big ones, and I was going to begin, when he changed his attitude. He flung himself on the earth, closed his eyes, and half-parted his lips.

"What is that?" I asked, a little surprised.

"The viper-charmer dead," he replied, without moving. "There is a slit in the rock, and the viper is stealing back into it, and the sun is red—quite red on the top of the rock, and the charmer is dead in the shade."

"I see," I said, much interested; "you sit to a painter for such a picture—but I like you living, and not dead."

"So—then," and he started to his feet, took up his box, and displayed its wares to imaginary customers. "This is the little viper-charmer, and the beautiful lady is afraid, and will not buy."

"I understand," remarked Mademoiselle Aubrey; "you sit for two pictures; in one you are living, and in the other dead. And who is it that paints you?"

If she expected to hear the name of one of the celebrated painters who yearly haunt this region, she was disappointed. The boy raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders. He did not know; the painter lived at Ganne's; he did not know how they called him, and, it was plain, he did not care. The sketch of the little viper-charmer leaning against the rock—for I declined using any one else's attitudes and ideas—was soon finished; Mademoiselle Aubrey smiled indulgently over it, and we went on.

Middle age is the time for all genuine hobbies, I dare say, but youth is the season for vehement fancies and eager wishing. Ferns were mine just then. I had had ferns, burnt and pared, in the rock-work of Mrs. Dawson's garden, and tended them with unavailing care—and now that I saw them in all their cool green beauty, with the fresh forest winds blowing through their tender fronds, I went wild with longing. Such as I could reach I captured, but some were as much out of my power as if they had been birds of the air, and I gazed at them in their lofty places with vain desire.

"It is no use, Mignonne," kindly said Mademoiselle Aubrey to me once. "You cannot get them."

"No," I regretfully replied, "I know I cannot, and yet I feel quite sure that one up there is a rare one."

We spoke in English, but our little guide, who was idly chewing a blade of grass, and curiously watching us with his keen eyes, and who had also seen me gathering ferns all the way, knew what I wished for. He said nothing, but, quietly putting down his case of reptiles, he climbed up the rock with the agility of a wild-cat, and was upon the summit in a moment. The fern grew in a deep, dark crevice, where it lived snugly in cool retirement, like a coy beauty, and was not easy of access.

"Oh! do not break it," I cried. "I would rather leave it, if I cannot have the root."

The lad took a clasp-knife from his pocket and tried to scoop the fern out, but in the effort his foot slipped on the withered pine-needles with which the slanting rock was thickly covered.

"Take care," I cried.

I spoke too late, for even as I spoke he rolled over the edge of the rock. I saw his scared face flashing before me, his outstretched hand vainly catching at a bunch of grass, then he fell down at our feet with a heavy sound, and there lay an inert mass, his hand still clasping the grass which he had torn from the rock in his fall.

"Good Heavens! the child is killed!" cried Mademoiselle Aubrey, white with terror.

We bent over him. He was still unconscious, and pale as death, save where a streak of blood trickled down his forehead. I took out my smelling-bottle, and was trying to revive him, when a huge black dog came barking and bounding up the gorge, then wheeled round us, snuffing inquiringly.

"Neptune," called a man's voice. Then suddenly the speaker appeared from behind a rock. He wore a slouched hat, and had all the paraphernalia of an artist strapped to his back, and, from his dog, I knew him for the young painter whom we had seen sketching the hollow tree by the road-side.

"What, my little viper-charmer, dead in good earnest!" he exclaimed in a tone of concern.

"Oh! monsieur," I cried, "do you think he is dead? He fell from that high rock."

With a swift, light hand, the young man tore open the boy's clothes, and laying his brown breast bare, he felt his heart.

"Dead, no!" he exclaimed, "only stunned. But we should have cold water. You have none,

of course? Wait! I know where to get some; or, better still, I shall take him to where it can be found."

In a moment he had unstrapped and thrown down all his belongings. Then, lifting up the lad as lightly as if his weight were nothing to him, he hoisted him upon his back, and carrying him across his shoulder, he went up the glen at a swift pace.

"Let us follow, Mignonne, that is our way," hurriedly said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

We hastened after the young man, who strode on, with the poor pale face of the boy hanging over his shoulder; while, without needing a bidding from his master, Neptune sat gravely down by his property, and stayed there watching us go with sagacious canine eyes.

"Take care, monsieur," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, anxiously, "the way is steep and trying for you, thus heavily laden."

The painter turned round toward us a young face, with bright yellow hair around it, and answered, with a look and in a tone of surprise:

"Oh! the boy is light as a feather. Besides, though I hope the young rascal is not much hurt, we had better lose no time. You need only follow me if you are going to the Brigand's Cave. We shall soon be there."

And, without saying more, he went on at the same rapid pace.

In a few minutes we had reached the Brigand's Cave. A lad of fifteen stood by the entrance, yawning in the sun. He stared on seeing us, and his hand which he had stretched out to take the little fagot with which we were to be lighted down the cave remained for a moment in the attitude, so great was his surprise.

"There, Joseph, get me some cold water for your friend!" cried the painter, gently putting the lad down. "He has got into trouble, as you see."

"His vipers have bitten him!" exclaimed Joseph (he was a seller of vipers too); and his eyes half started out of his head at the thought.

"No, no, get me the water. He has fallen down a rock."

Joseph ran to a shed close by, and soon came back with some cold water. Mademoiselle Aubrey took it, and washed the boy's forehead, while the painter, by a more liberal application, soon restored our little guide to consciousness. He had no limbs broken, and had sustained no serious injury, but was still confused and stunned. His first thought was for his vipers. "Where are they?" he said, feebly; and looking askance at Joseph, he muttered something about his hop-

ing that he (Joseph) had not got them; a hint which Joseph received with a smile of calm scorn.

"Your reptiles are down the gorge, and under the care of Neptune, and therefore perfectly safe," said the painter. "Come now, can you walk?" But the first step the boy took made him utter a cry of pain—he had cut his foot in his fall. "So I must carry you on to your uncle's, must I?" good-humoredly said the young man.

He hoisted the lad up on his back again, and just lifting up his slouched hat from his thick yellow hair, he struck down a path with a cavalier "Mesdames, je vous salue."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, hurrying after him, "but if you will allow us, we will go down the gorge with you."

He turned round in some surprise.

"Had you not better go through the Robber's Den?" he suggested. "I am afraid of stumbling with the lad; but it is the readier way."

Mademoiselle Aubrey, ever considerate, looked at me, and said:

"You must see the famous cavern, Mignonne, for we may never come this way again."

So Joseph lit his fagot, and showed us down a real cave, in which not a hundred years ago, real thieves had lived. The red light flashed back from the dark walls of rock; then suddenly we stepped out into the bright daylight, and were once more in a lofty solitude of rock and tree and sky.

"Where are they?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey, looking round her, for neither the painter nor the lad was visible.

They were gone, no doubt for some good reason, and Joseph either would not or could not give us any information as to the route they had probably taken. Indeed, he was singularly reticent concerning his little rival and professed to know nothing, save that he was an impostor! Vipers!—his were not real vipers, only shams and counterfeits; but where the boy lived, or could be found again, was more than he chose to tell.

"Let us go down to Barbison," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, giving him up in despair. "Perhaps your guardian may have seen him."

But when, after hurrying down a steep path, we reached an open space, where the carriage was waiting, and Mr. de Lusignan was finishing his cigar, we found, to our great disappointment, that no young painter with a ragged boy on his back had come that way. Mademoiselle Aubrey's face fell, and she told her brother-in-law

our little adventure. He heard her with much composure, and said, calmly:

"I dare say your little viper-seller will turn up before long. I expect to see him at the gate of the Fair Gabrielle before the week is out."

"I wish we may," heartily said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"And I would give any thing to know where to find him," I added, warmly; "he was hurt on my account."

"Do not take the matter to heart, Mignonne," half kindly, half laughingly said Mr. de Lusignan. "If your viper-seller does not turn up, as I said, before the week is out, I shall get him for you. Well! you have seen the thieves' den, and that is over. We are close to Barbison; we may as well do that too."

I felt that I was a very great bore.

"Must we go to Barbison?" asked mademoiselle, wistfully.

"Why not?" He spoke so shortly that I ventured to say, as we got into the carriage—

"Please, sir, I really do not care to see any thing more to-day."

Mr. de Lusignan ignored my remark, and bade the coachman drive us on to Barbison, which was, indeed, close by.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT is called "the whole world" among artists, certainly knows that Barbison is a colony of landscape-painters, some of whom have attained high renown in their art. But of all concerning that "whole world" I was then utterly ignorant, and Barbison took me by surprise. As we entered the dirty, sunburnt street of the little village, I was struck at once with the peculiar aspect of the place. A lady in very dingy white stood talking to a young man in a wide-awake hat, at the door of a little furnished house, with its yellow bill flaunting in the sun. A painter sat sketching the street with its background of forest green, a group of bearded men were lounging a little farther. Artists evidently abode here, and so did cocks and hens too, for I heard a good deal of crowing and cackling, and saw some farm-houses with their inevitable dunghills.

"And there is Ganne's!" said Mr. de Lusignan, with a twinkle in his eye. "Get down, and look at that sign, Mignonne."

He was once more quite good-humored, and helped us to alight at the door of a little inn. Is the famous sign-board which I saw then hang-

ing there still? I suppose so. It amused me much, reckless though was the humor in which it had been painted. The laughing, jovial head of the inn-keeper appeared in the centre of the board, and on either side, a painter, his wife, and his dog, had been depicted. But on one side this family party was entering the inn in a state of leanness comparable only to that of Pharaoh's lean kine; and, on the other, it was shown as leaving that home of good cheer so burdened with flesh, that the three, husband, wife, and dog, could hardly move. I laughed at this broad caricature till the tears ran down my cheeks.

"There are more inside, Mignonne," said Mr. de Lusignan, who was chuckling internally.

There were more indeed! The parlor was panelled with them. There was not an inch of spare room on the walls. Landscapes, which told of many a young artist's wanderings in far-away lands; allegories, caricatures, dashing roysterers' scenes, all appeared there pell-mell, each bearing those individual tokens which are as significant in pictures as features in the human face.

"There are more in another room," said a young girl who stood waiting to know what we were going to order.

We crossed the yard and the kitchen, and entered a much smaller room, where the cloth was laid for us.

"I wonder, Mignonne, if we could get tidings of our handsome young painter here?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey, addressing me. "Do you not think it was to him our viper-seller sat—and did he not say that he lived at Ganne's?"

I replied that I thought so.

"And we could identify him by his beauty," continued Mademoiselle Aubrey, musingly. "It is not likely there should be two such handsome men in one house."

I opened my eyes and stared.

"Was he handsome, mademoiselle?"

"Bless the child!" she answered, gayly, "he was the greatest beauty of his sex that I ever saw. Did you not notice it?"

"I saw that he was young, and had a good deal of yellow hair," I answered, "but I did not notice that he was very handsome."

"Perhaps Mignonne does not know what beauty is," suggested Mr. de Lusignan, with mock gravity.

"I am afraid of it," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey; "for indeed my young painter was wonderfully handsome—and, what is more, he looked as kind as he was beautiful. He spoke French very well, too, and yet I fancy he is not a Frenchman."

I suppose Mr. de Lusignan had already enough of the argument, for he sat down in the window and looked out into the street, with a gaze that had become suddenly moody. Mademoiselle Aubrey looked at him, and a cloud came over her cheerful face; then with a half-sigh she too sat down, and turned her chair so that her back was to the light. I vaguely felt that some chill breath from the depths of the past had come over them both—some memory of that time which was a blank to me.

It was very uncomfortable to see these two so cheerless. I tried to look at the paintings on the cupboard-doors. I have forgotten what they were about, but I know that one cupboard opened in the very middle of the picture, ruthlessly dividing a poor dog in two. I was looking at him, wondering how he liked it, and if he would stay thus forever, with his two halves parting every time napkins and table-cloths were wanted, when a light sound behind me made me turn round.

The door of the room had opened gently, and a lady in black stood on the threshold, with her hand on the lock. The light from the window in which Mr. de Lusignan was sitting fell on her face, and the gloom of the inn-kitchen was behind her. She stood irresolute for a moment—the fairest of pictures on that homely background—during which I looked at her in breathless admiration. Never, even in my dreams, had I seen a creature so handsome as this woman. The brown hair with golden gleams, the deep-blue eyes, the perfect profile, the lovely mouth, the head of classic beauty, and figure of nymph-like grace—she had them all, and with them the bloom of little more than twenty years. She stood irresolute for one moment, as I said; then, with a quiet bend of her stately head, she entered the room, took up a book lying on a chair, and the next moment she was gone. When the door closed upon her, we all three stared at each other. My guardian drew a long breath.

"What a splendid creature!" he said, his brown eyes sparkling. "What an exquisite head!"

"And what a figure!" said his sister-in-law.

"I never did see such a beautiful woman!" I cried.

"You never did see!" echoed Mademoiselle Aubrey, with good-humored emphasis on the pronoun. "Why, the young painter was much handsomer, and you never saw it."

"Handsome than that lady! O mademoiselle, is that possible?"

"My dear, it is a fact, I assure you. He was quite an Apollo."

I could not believe it; and we had a hot argument, like that of the Fairy and the Geni in the Arabian tale, each averring the beauty of his or her favorite; but, unluckily, Mr. de Lusignan could not act as umpire.

"She's English," he said, musingly, when our contest relaxed; "and yet I have seen a head like hers in the Vatican."

He had ordered an omelette to begin with. It now came in. Mr. de Lusignan, whose will was his law, said to the girl who laid the dish on the table:

"Does not this room belong to the English lady who came here for a book just now?"

"Oh! no," replied the girl, coolly; "Madame Smith sits here sometimes, but it is not her room."

"English! I said so!" triumphantly exclaimed Mr. de Lusignan, addressing his sister-in-law, as the girl left us. "But how I do hate that Smith!" he added, with a look of the deepest disgust. "He is the greatest, the most notorious impostor this earth ever bore. When young Charles Stuart and princely Buckingham go off on their wild quest to Spain, they travel through England as Tom and John Smith. When Louis Philippe takes flight, he is Mr. Smith forthwith; and if a woman wants to hide in an out-of-the-way place, she becomes Madame Smith at once. Thieves, cheats, and the rest, are all Smiths, as a matter of course. Smith, in short, means Anonymous, or Anonyma, as the case may be. Every one knows it, and every one does it. I have no doubt that if I wanted to abscond, or to hide, I should become a Smith."

"Oh! I wish we could see her again!" I exclaimed, eagerly. "Oh! if I only could draw such a face as that!"

"You volatile creature! Were you not all for an old gate yesterday? And do you want a lovely young face to-day? Now I, who do not draw, am speculating about Monsieur Smith. What is he like? Good gracious! only think, Mignonne, if he should be a burly, red-faced John Bull, with goggle eyes! Hideous, yet very probable! Beautiful women like coarse, ugly men, as a rule."

"Perhaps there is no Monsieur Smith," I said, rather indignant at this vision of a goggle-eyed husband.

"Perhaps there is not. Only, what would bring a beautiful widow to a painter's inn like this?"

No one answered this awkward question. Mademoiselle Aubrey, indeed, purposely changed the subject; but when Mr. de Lusignan left us to

smoke a cigar, he no doubt managed to learn something more about Madame Smith, for he said, rather dryly, as he joined us again:

"You were right, Mignonne, there is no Monsieur Smith; but there is a Master Smith. Two years old."

"And is she really living here alone?" I exclaimed.

"What if she is, my dear?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey, good-humoredly. "Beautiful ladies are often eccentric; for beauty is power, and its possessors rely upon it to follow their own whim, whatever that whim may be."

"No," said Mr. de Lusignan, "such is not the case. Mrs. Smith"—I noticed he did not say Madame Smith—"has been here two days, and leaves to-morrow. She has taken a furnished house at the other end of the village, and is only waiting till it is empty, to leave the inn."

I wondered if the child was as beautiful as its mother, but Mr. de Lusignan could give me no information on that head. We had seen all there was to be seen; it was time to go, and we entered the open carriage that had brought us, and which was now waiting in the sunny street outside the gate. I looked up at the sign-board once more, and, in doing so, I saw a child's head looking down at us from an open window.

"I wonder if that is Mrs. Smith's little boy?" I whispered to my guardian. He mechanically raised his eyes. For a while his look expressed no more than curiosity; then, all at once, a change so deep, so sudden, and so strange, passed across his face, that I was confounded. I looked from him to Mademoiselle Aubrey. She was ashy white, and shook visibly. I stared at them both, then looked up at the child again. He was still gazing down at us, a pale, sallow child, with dark eyes, and a serious little round face, and behind him, farther back in the shadowy part of the room, I perceived the beautiful woman, his mother.

"Harry, take care," she said, in a pleasant, ringing voice.

The boy neither moved nor answered. He continued looking down at us, with the imperceptible gravity of childhood. All this time the driver had been searching for his whip, which had got astray. He found it at last, and clambered up to his seat. He gave us a look; my guardian merely nodded, and we drove away.

I looked at Mr. de Lusignan and at Mademoiselle Aubrey—neither minded me; they were staring at each other with a significant intentness which I had never seen in their looks before. If I had not been there, they would have

spoken; but something had happened which each knew, and the other understood—something that was a secret and a mystery to me. Mr. de Lusignan was very moody all the way home. When we alighted, he said to Mademoiselle Aubrey:

"I should like to speak to you for a few moments."

"Very well," she answered.

They did not enter the house, but, leaving me on the steps, at once walked away in the grounds. I stood looking after their two figures as they went down an alley, all aglow with the redness of the setting sun. I confess it, I would have given any thing to know the subject of that discourse, which made their two heads almost meet as they talked, which made them walk with steps so uncertain and so slow, and once kept them standing still, as if every thing else in this world were forgotten. What could it all be about? I stood looking after them in unconscious curiosity, till the housemaid's black eyes, staring down at me from an upper window in evident inquisitiveness, recalled me to myself. I went up to my room, and looked at the gate, and even took out my sketch-book; but it would not do. I suppose I should not have been mortal if I had not tried to conjecture what the nature of Mr. de Lusignan's secret could be. My surmises were wild enough, yet not wilder than the truth, and so near it that they are not worth recording here.

I was as watchful as a young mouse during the whole of dinner-time, pricking up my little ears for every crumb of information; but none fell from the lips of my two companions. Mademoiselle Aubrey was silent and abstracted, and Mr. de Lusignan, though restless, was more capricious and wayward than ever, and said not a word which could enlighten me. When dinner was over, he went out for a stroll, and Mademoiselle Aubrey sat down to read in one of the drawing-room windows, making the most of the fading light. I sat by another window, and being virtuously resolved not to look at her, I took instead a survey of the pale, shadowy walls of the room. It was a large one, and was adorned by ancient prints in black frames, very large, very hard, and very dry. They all represented Dutch landscapes, with most unjoyous Dutch boors drinking beneath the porches of neat Dutch inns. My guardian said they were valuable, but they chilled my heart; and in the secret of that heart I hated them. The gray, faded doors, with their Louis XV. carvings of gray flowers and fruit, hanging in gray wreaths, were a little more seductive to the eye; but I soon got tired of them. The next object of interest was a stately sofa,

with a wiry back, and thin, wiry legs, that always made me think of it as a shaky old gentleman requiring my merciful consideration, and not to be sat upon unless in some hour of dire need. This remarkable piece of furniture, and its offspring, four arm-chairs and six chairs, all standing straight against the walls, were covered with antique yellow silk, on which diminutive sprigs of faded roses and periwinkles had told to dead-and-buried generations the sweet stories of by-gone springs; but they had nothing to say to me now, and being still virtuously bent on not watching my silent companion, I looked hard at two tall and narrow looking-glasses, facing each other, and across whose gloomy surface shot a few gleams of the light from without. When even this would not do, I leaned out of the window, and looked at the flagged terrace, at the vases of scarlet geraniums, and at my dear old gate, with its garland of tender green stirring gently on the evening air. The cook was still busy below, and a faint clatter of dishes and saucepans rose from the kitchen; but the house-maid, the gardener, and my guardian's courier, were all standing outside the gate in the quiet street, talking and laughing together; while far away an organ was playing "*Partant pour la Syrie*."

"I suppose I can look at her now, and not be inquisitive," I thought, a little crossly, at the end of a quarter of an hour; and look I did, and with a not unnatural reaction of feeling, I did not take my eyes off Mademoiselle Aubrey for the next half-hour. All that my looking told me was, that she did not turn the pages of her book once during that time, but that she sighed twice, and both times very sadly, and even wearily.

I did not see my guardian again that evening, and he did not appear at breakfast the next morning. He was gone out for the day, Mademoiselle Aubrey told me. "Is he gone to Barbison?" was on the tip of my tongue; though, of course, I did not say so. Of course, too, my imagination went wild again; but I was not kept long in suspense. As I sat alone in my room, and began to think that of all unpleasant, awkward positions, to be an unwilling and excluded third in a family secret was the most unpleasant and awkward, Mademoiselle Aubrey's voice asking outside, "May I come in?" put the ungracious mood to flight. I ran to open to her with sudden gladness. She was as pleasant to me as sunshine on a dark day, and as welcome.

"I have come to show you something, Mignonne," she said—"look!"

She put a miniature in my hand. It was the portrait of a boy of three or four years of age—a

pale boy, with a little serious round face and solemn, big black eyes. I uttered a cry.

"Surely," I exclaimed, "that is not the child we saw yesterday?"

"No, it is not," she quietly replied; "this boy was Mr. de Lusignan's son, and my nephew."

I looked at the portrait again, then at Mademoiselle Aubrey. I did not know what to say.

"Mr. de Lusignan is gone to Barbison," she resumed; "and before he went he said to me, 'You may tell her.' I think he was right. Mysteries are awkward things, and very useless."

I felt much agitated, and also much flattered by this proof of my guardian's confidence, and with the impulsiveness of my years, I cried eagerly:

"Oh! Mr. de Lusignan may be sure I shall not tell a soul!"

"My good child," she answered, laying her hand on my arm with an amused smile, "what soul have you to tell in Fontainebleau?"

This was very true, but I none the less colored up in some indignation at the unflattering remark. Mademoiselle Aubrey continued:

"By the time we leave this place the mystery will be solved, and Mr. de Lusignan will not care about it; and, in the mean while, he takes you into his confidence, because he would not be under the restraint of excluding you."

I was silent. If I looked as I felt, I fear I must have looked very sulky. With her usual composure, Mademoiselle Aubrey resumed:

"Your guardian is gone to Barbison, because he thinks that the child whom we saw there yesterday is the child of his dead son."

All my ill-humor vanished. I had thought this very thing, yet I was startled and half frightened to hear it spoken.

"Does he really?" I said, under my breath.

"He does, and"—after a pause—"so do I."

My emotion kept me speechless; for when we are young, we take most things, whether they concern us or not, a good deal to heart.

"I know," she continued, "how improbable it seems that, among the many hundred thousand British babies, this particular baby—he is scarcely more—should be Mr. de Lusignan's grandson; and yet I believe that boy to be my nephew Henry's child."

I was rather startled to hear this, for, though I had not thought about it, the large number of British babies thus alluded to by Mademoiselle Aubrey did stagger me for a moment. She went on:

"The coincidences in this case are peculiar and striking. Mr. de Lusignan discovered, after

his son's death, that Henry had been married in a little country church in Surrey, under the name of Henry Lusignan Smith, to a girl called Louisa Jones. All the inquiries he set on foot to learn more failed till this morning, when he received a letter, informing him that, on the very day when Henry was married, a young and remarkably handsome woman, who gave the name of Mrs. Smith, but who offered no references, as she stated that she had just come from abroad, took quiet lodgings at Notting Hill. She expected her husband that night, she said. He came, but so late that Mrs. Wood, the landlady, did not see him. She tried to get a glimpse of him the next morning, but he had already left the house. Mrs. Smith stayed ten days at Notting Hill. At the end of that time she left suddenly, forfeiting nearly three weeks' rent—driven away, I have no doubt, by the curiosity of her landlady; for, spite all her attempts to do so, Mrs. Wood never succeeded in seeing Mr. Smith's face. She knew he was young by his gait and carriage, but she knew no more. After Mrs. Smith was gone, Mrs. Wood found in her lodger's room an old visiting-card, which had been used to label a trunk. This card she saved up, with the curiosity of her class, and sold for the moderate sum of one guinea to the Private Inquiry Office agent, by whom these scanty particulars have been discovered. It was enclosed in the letter which Mr. de Lusignan got this morning. It is torn and soiled, but on one side 'Mrs. Smith' is written in a bold hand, of which it is impossible to say whether it be a man's or a woman's, and, on the other, are engraved Mr. de Lusignan's own name and address. When your guardian told me, yesterday evening, the suspicions which the likeness of the little stranger at Barbison to his dead son had raised in his mind, I acknowledged the resemblance, but refused to draw any inference from it; but I confess that this morning, after reading the letter and seeing the card, I altered my mind. Do what I will, I cannot help thinking now that the Mrs. Smith, whom we saw yesterday, is my nephew's widow."

I had heard her open-eyed and open-mouthed in eager excitement. I now remarked:

"Why should she hide, mademoiselle?"

"Perhaps she is not hiding; perhaps she never knew her husband's real name; but, I confess, I do not think that likely. My impression is that she hates and fears Mr. de Lusignan, and will let him have no sort of hold upon her or her child."

"But why should she hate and fear him?" I exclaimed. Then, feeling, by my companion's

silence, how indiscreet in me it was to question, I colored up, and said, hastily—"I beg your pardon; I did not mean to—to be rude."

"Of course not.—Well, Mignonne, we are our own mistresses to-day—what shall we do?"

I longed to see the gardens, of which I had got glimpses from the palace-windows; I said so, and to the gardens, after luncheon, we went.

I love gardens; I love them dearly. I do not ask them to give me the wild grace of Nature, no more than I ask them for her careless majesty. The forest, the wilderness, the barren sea-shore, the endless plain, are hers. If we want her, let us seek her there, and she will give us raptures with which no garden delights can compare. But let us not lay profane hands on her domain, or try to write down her solemn beauties on one little page. She is both limitless and inimitable. She will not be enclosed within walls, and laughs at all our small counterfeits, at our vain attempts to imprison her, with a mighty yet sorrowful scorn. If I love gardens, therefore, I do not love them as being the epitomes, the *multum in parvo* of the great and gracious mother. I love them because they are not open, but enclosed, little green islands scattered over the land, that man may have shade and sunshine, the beauty of flowers, the freshness of waters, and call them his. They give me that very sense of sweet security which it is the subtle charm of Nature to dispel. There is secret awe in the aspect of the tamest landscape, but in gardens, whatever royal majesty and splendor may be thrown over them, there is none. Let them be as they like, cool and shady, with winding alleys and water-falls, and shining lakes, I feel this as keenly as when they are trim and formal, with avenues of clipped trees, parterres of garish flowers, and statues that stand forever motionless in the hot sun, and never shrink from chill, autumn blasts, through all the weary years that pass over them.

I went into almost equal raptures with the two gardens which Fontainebleau possesses. The day was hot, and, during its early hours, we found the Jardin Anglais delightfully cool and green. We left it when the power of the scorching sun abated, and I fed the carps in the pond which divides the modern from the old parterre. Hoary carps, as frisky and as greedy as if they had been carps in their teens, tumbled over one another in shoals, and fought valiantly for the bread I threw to them with a liberal hand. With the eyes of faith, I fear, I saw their collars of gold glittering through the sunny water.

"I see them, indeed I do," I cried to my com-

panion, who stood by me, leaning on the balustrade, and looking down passively.

"Do you?" she said, and sighed so wearily, as it seemed to me, that I asked eagerly if we should not go home.

"Not till you have seen the parterre, Mignonne."

The fashion of Fontainebleau never visits the parterre. Officers never lounge there, looking much bored, and officers' wives (Fontainebleau is a garrison town) never go to sit and read novels in its alleys, or watch their children at play, as they all do in the Jardin Anglais. The parterre, so royal once, is very plebeian now. Louis XIII. and Richelieu, Christina and Monaldeschi, Louis XIV., and the tender-hearted La Vallière, have been succeeded by old women in caps, poorly-clad children, who tumble on the grass unchecked; dogs who scamper about in great glee, and valetudinarians who sit in the warm alleys, safe from the treacherous rheumatism that lurks in the well-watered Jardin Anglais. And yet this old parterre is forsaken, not neglected. Gardeners are ever at work to keep it as neat and trim as if Madame de Maintenon herself were going to step down from her rooms in the palace, and take a stately walk along her own solemn avenue. The old-fashioned quaintness of the place won my heart, and, when we came to an ancient high-roofed and ivy-clad little house, standing all alone in a grassy plot, where it overlooked the bright flowers below, and the central fountain, with its waters dancing gayly in the sun, I uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Oh! that dear little house!" I cried, aloud; and to myself I thought: "How delightful it would be to live with dear James Carr in so neat and tidy an abode as was this!"

"I wonder who lived there formerly?" I said to Mademoiselle Aubrey. She had sat down to rest on a bench, and was looking round her wistfully. But she heard me, for she replied:

"A good and wise man, Mignonne. Sully, the minister of Henry IV. Other men have lived in it since that day, yet the place bears his name, and is still called Pavillon de Sully. I believe the palace architect lives there now."

"Why, how well you know Fontainebleau!" I said, heedlessly.

"Yes," she answered, very sadly, "I do."

She bowed her head, and I saw the tears stealing down her cheeks. This part of the gardens was lonely just then, and no stranger could see us.

"I beg your pardon," I exclaimed, much dis-

tressed. "I ought to know better. Of course you were here formerly, with—with your nephew."

"Yes, and with another, too," she answered, in a low voice. "I showed you a portrait, Mignonne, but at the back of that is another which you did not see." I sat down by her. My perplexity and my wonder were in my face, I suppose, for she added, in the same low tones, "I will tell you all about it some day. Let us look at the Pavillon de Sully now."

We walked round it, then we came back to the bench and sat down again. The gardens were still very quiet, and only a few children were playing on the grass-plot near us. A young girl with a rosy face was looking out of the window in the pavilion. Was she the architect's daughter? How nice if James were the architect of this grand old place! What walks we could have in those dear old gardens, and what drives we should take in the green forest!

"My dear, I will tell you now," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, whose thoughts had not gone wool-gathering like mine.

I gave a little start, and, in a moment, was all attention.

CHAPTER VII.

"My second situation as a governess was with your guardian's brother. He was a struggling barrister, and my salary was low; but Agnes, my pupil, was docile and intelligent, and both Mr. de Lusignan and his little sickly wife were very kind to me. Our home, however, was not a comfortable one. We lived in a large house in Russell Square, which was nearly empty. It was Mrs. de Lusignan's own house, and I often thought her husband had married her for it. She was always moaning about the taxes. 'So heavy, you know, Mademoiselle Aubrey; and we could have such a nice villa somewhere for the money, or, at least, a little more; but Mr. de Lusignan is so obstinate.' I had been two years with them, when they kindly asked my sister Maria, who was music-teacher in a school in Paris, to come and spend her holidays with me. She was very, very beautiful; your guardian was then a young man; he fell desperately in love with her, and married her before her visit to me was over. I loved her dearly, for was she not my sister, my solitary tie of flesh and blood in a strange country? But we had seen very little of each other since our childhood; our two lives had flowed apart. I was young, too, in these

days, and, when she died, soon after the birth of her child, I grieved sorely for her, but with no incurable sorrow; and she soon became to me as a shadow of the past.

"Blood is strong, no doubt; but the affections of a poor governess are apt to stray from her own kin, and to get bound to the strangers among whom her lot is cast. I liked that poor, weak, ailing, foolish Mrs. de Lusignan, who got to lean upon me in all her household troubles, asking me for that strength which she so sadly needed. I got, too, to like dearly her second and last child, a boy born on the same day, and bearing the same name with my little nephew, and who, baby though he was, loved me better than mother, nurse, sister, or father. Our Harry was two years old when his poor mother died. Sick people have strange fancies. She made me promise never to desert her children, and her husband never to part them from me. She was on her death-bed, and we both pledged ourselves to obey her.

"And now, Mignonne, will a young thing like you understand me? Can you realize what it is to rear a child? Do you know what a child is?—how wayward, how endearing, how beautiful, how perverse! My Harry was all this; and he became the apple of my eye, the darling of my heart. I nursed him through all his ailments, and he had many. Night after night I sat by him as he lay moaning; and when I thought that my watching might soon be over, that the little querulous, wailing voice might soon be silent, that the little crib might soon be as empty as a bird's-nest when the young birds have flown out on the summer air, I felt as if my heart must break; but it did not, for he lived, and, as he grew sturdy and strong, I became ambitious for his sake. Your guardian owes his wealth to his cousin and godfather, the banker; but my Mr. de Lusignan was poor. Money was scarce at Russell Square. I was house-keeper, as well as nurse and governess. To save money, and to keep my darling as long as I could, I learned as much Greek and Latin as enabled me to teach him. He was a rarely-gifted boy. His quickness and his memory were wonderful. There was a touch of genius in him too. And then he was so brave, so generous, so manly, and so true that he made every heart his. Your guardian would have given any thing to have his Harry like ours. My poor sister's child was indolent, vacillating, and obstinate. He was kind-hearted, but he failed in energy; even in that energy which enables the erring to bear the brunt of their own sins.

"The two cousins were much attached, and

Mr. de Lusignan generously resolved that they should be as brothers, and enjoy the same advantages of education; so he took my Harry from us when he was twelve years old. Ah! many and many a time I have wished that he had not been so kind, but had left my boy to me. For his kindness was fatal to us all. The first mischief was that, while my nephew stumbled at every step in his studies, my Harry reached the goal almost without an effort; but the worst was that Mr. de Lusignan's son, being weak, leaned on his cousin, who was strong, and made him bear the burden of his sins; so Mr. de Lusignan, who already felt some natural jealousy of his son's inferiority, began to mistrust the companion he had given him; and yet he loved him—he could not help it. Every dog fawned upon my Harry; every child smiled in his face; every man and woman who came near him rejoiced in his honest brown eyes—in his cheery voice and frank smile. My nephew was much the handsomer lad of the two, but every one loved Harry best.

"The two lads were fifteen when we all came on a visit to Mr. de Lusignan, who had taken a little *château* near Fontainebleau, for the summer. I forgot to tell you, Mignonne, that my Mr. de Lusignan had then been married two years to his second wife, a rich widow."

"Were you happy with that lady?" I quickly asked.

"Never mind, my dear," she replied, with a smile. "Agnes was a good girl, and though she never was to me what her brother had been, I remembered my promise to her dead mother, and we did not part till Mr. de Lusignan died. She then remained with her step-mother, got married, and went to India, where she is still, and I came to keep house for your guardian. The house in Russell Square was sold, and that English home, where the best and happiest years of my life had been spent, was broken up, as, many years before, my French home had been laid waste and made desolate by death."

I looked at Mademoiselle Aubrey, and she smiled and shook her head.

"No, Mignonne," she said, "there was no romance between my Harry's father and me, if that is what you mean. I should not have said him nay, if he had asked me to become his wife—I was too fond of my darling for that; but I felt no pang of jealousy when he chose another woman, and put me by. I am not the heroine of my little tale, Mignonne; I am only the looker-on, whose business it is to see things as they pass, and tell them again to a younger generation.

"We had been a week at Jussienne—that was the name of Mr. de Lusignan's *château*—when there occurred an event which ruled all my Harry's life. I was sitting with Agnes in a room on the ground-floor, when the two boys looked in at us through the open window. They both had their tin cases and green nets. Henry, my nephew, cared little for botany or natural history; but his cousin Harry—we called him so to distinguish them—was bitten by both, and had infected him. They looked in at us, as I said, and when I saw their two handsome, boyish faces, bright as the sun which shone upon them, I felt as if I could have looked at my fair nephew and my dark Harry—so different though so much alike—forever. For surely, if there be a beautiful thing upon earth, it is youth in its early strength and promise. Ah! how strange it would have seemed to me then if any one had told me that I was to outlive these two!

"‘We are going out,’ said my Harry, in his gay young voice.

"‘Where to?’ asked Mr. de Lusignan, so abruptly, that we all started.

"‘We are going Brunoy way, uncle,’ replied Harry, turning toward a part of the garden which my look could not reach.

"‘Do not mistake your direction,’ said Mr. de Lusignan, sharply.

"Again it was Harry who answered.

"‘On my word, uncle,’ he replied, earnestly.

"‘Very well,’ said your guardian, and I heard his step walking away along the gravelled path.

"Jussienne was within a league of this forest to which we drove daily, but your guardian had strictly forbidden the boys to go to it alone. He is a sensitive man, and to have these two lads wandering alone in that forest, which covers I do not know how many square miles, would have made him as wretchedly nervous as any woman. My Harry was then in all the fervor of a young botanist's first season, and he felt the prohibition keenly. None of the princes who vainly attempted to enter the forest where the enchanted beauty lay sleeping, ever looked at its green skirts of trees more longingly than he looked at the dark rim that was visible from all our windows.

"‘There must be such ferns there,’ he used to say to me; ‘I am sure I could get the *Osmunda regalis*, if uncle would only let us go.’

"‘But he will not,’ I answered, ‘so do not attempt it.’

"‘Would that be a deadly sin?’ asked Harry, with a laugh.

"‘My dear boy,’ I persisted, ‘your uncle is

very fond of you, but he would never forgive wilful disobedience.'

"Harry did not answer, but he laughed again. He would not have taken the matter so lightly, if he had known Mr. de Lusignan half as well as I did.

"And now, Mignonne, you know why Mr. de Lusignan spoke so sharply to the two boys, and why Harry's replies were so earnest. Well, the long summer day passed, and the lads did not come back. The dinner-bell rang, and when we met in the dining-room, Mr. de Lusignan looked black as night—his brother happened to be in Paris for a few days—for neither Henry nor Harry appeared. I felt very uneasy, but never spoke till Agnes, who has a gift for unlucky speeches, remarked:

"I hope they did not go to the forest.'

"Mr. de Lusignan dropped his knife and fork with a clang.

"They had better not,' he said, so angrily that a dead silence fell on us all. Dinner was over, and still these two boys did not come. We went out into the garden, and sat there. Mr. de Lusignan remained in the dining-room, but he was not drinking. He paced the room up and down, never pausing, never ceasing. At first I could see him from where I sat, and never had seen his face look so angry; but, as the daylight faded, it became indistinct, then, when twilight set it, it vanished. I only saw a dark figure moving to and fro; I only heard that unceasing step, which made me think of a tiger in his cage. You may laugh, Mignonne; Mr. de Lusignan laughed too, when, after this was all over, I told him what my impressions had been. When ten struck, I could bear it no longer. I went up to one of the open windows and said to him:

"Mr. de Lusignan, what will you do?"

"What about?" he asked, sharply, and suddenly standing still as he said it.

"Those children."

"And what do you want me to do?" he asked, with a burst of passion. 'Do you know where they went to?"

"No more than you do,' I answered, quietly.

"Well, then, nothing can be done,' he rejoined, sharply; and he began pacing the room up and down once more.

"At eleven, we all went up to our respective rooms. Mr. de Lusignan choosing to do nothing, no one ventured to interfere. I sat up alone in my room, feeling utterly wretched. At twelve, I heard some one leaving the house, and riding away. I guessed it was Mr. de Lusignan; but his quest at such an hour was useless, of course.

I heard him coming back toward six in the morning. He looked very haggard when we all met at breakfast, but spoke no more of the absent boys than if they had not existed. However, matters were not so desperate as they had seemed, for, before our dreary meal was half over, the truants came in. Mr. de Lusignan's sullen face turned white as he heard their voices in the hall, but he went on drinking his coffee. Agnes, who looked much scared, did not dare to stir. Her step-mother, who was very fond of Harry, said:

"Thank Heaven! that is a relief!' And, for my part, I do not mind telling you, Mignonne, that when I heard my Harry's voice, I could not contain myself, but burst into tears. They entered the room together, Harry leading the way, Henry skulking behind him. His sullen, defiant look told me at once that he, and he only, was to blame; but my poor boy was spokesman, and, as usual, bore the brunt of his uncle's wrath.

"We are very sorry, uncle,' he began.

"For what?" asked Mr. de Lusignan, putting down his cup and looking amazed.

"Poor Harry flushed up to the roots of his brown hair. When Mr. de Lusignan is quiet, and not impetuous, he is very angry indeed.

"For having made you anxious about us,' continued Harry, simply.

"Mr. de Lusignan stared.

"Anxious about two young men of such rare discretion,' he said, sarcastically; 'my dear fellow, is *that* possible?"

"I saw my poor boy biting his nether lip; but he only said, earnestly:

"Uncle, we are very sorry.'

"He said no more; he gave no explanation; he volunteered no statement. Now there passed a meaning in Mr. de Lusignan's eyes which boded no good to the speaker. Of course you know, my dear, that your guardian has remarkably large brown eyes, which are keen or gentle, flashing or mellow, as he pleases. Well, all the De Lusignans had these eyes. Even my fair nephew, who was like his mother in all else, had his father's eyes; and this was the only trait either of body or of mind which was common to these two. Well, as I was telling you, there passed in Mr. de Lusignan's eyes a meaning that boded no good to the boys, and I read that angry meaning back again in Henry's. Still, it was not he, but Harry who spoke.

"We were going toward Brunoy, as I told you, uncle, but we missed the right road—'

"And went in the opposite direction,' suggested Mr. de Lusignan, sarcastically.

"'Yes, we went in the opposite direction,' replied Harry, simply. He spoke calmly, not defiantly—more like an erring man, who can bear the consequences of his error, than like a disobedient boy, who neither knows how to obey, nor how to receive reproof.

"'To the forest, I suppose?' continued his uncle.

"'Yes, to the forest,' said Harry; but I could read the keenest pain in his honest face as he thus acknowledged having broken his word.

"'To get specimens, etc.,' continued Mr. de Lusignan, sarcastically; 'the Fontainebleau viper, etc.'

"Harry did not answer.

"'May I ask to know where you both spent the night?' said Mr. de Lusignan, in another tone.

"'In an empty lodge in the forest. We got in at the window; left it with dawn this morning, and made our way here.'

"On hearing this, his uncle's anger broke out into speech. He was white with passion; his eyes blazed; his lips quivered; he had suffered agonies for these two boys; and as his pain had been, so was his wrath—excessive. It was terrible to see it; and I felt half sick. Neither Mrs. de Lusignan nor Agnes ventured to utter a word in favor of the two culprits; and when I spoke, I was not heeded at first. But at length I helped to calm him a little.

"'Very well,' he said, turning to Harry, 'let this be over; but remember two things: the next time you tempt my son into disobedience, I shall part you two forever; also that, though I forgive yesterday's work, I shall never forget it.' And to his own sorrow, as well as to Harry's, he never did.

"I do not think Mr. de Lusignan ever asked to know the particulars of this escapade. I fancied he did not mind laying the blame on poor Harry, in order not to feel too angry with his own son. I had no such feelings; and, under promise of secrecy, I got the truth from Harry. Henry had deliberately gone to the forest, and Harry had followed him with a sore heart.

"And now, my dear, I must skip a few years, or I shall never have done. Harry's father is dead, Agnes is married, the two lads are young men now, and they live with your guardian, for whom I am keeping house, in an old mansion at Hampstead, which he has taken on a long lease. It was a beautiful place, with lovely grounds around it, and I spent there two happy years.

"I had a pleasant little sitting-room of my own, and Harry never missed once coming to chat in the evening with me. I expected him,

and always sat up for him, however late it might be. Henry was very kind to me, but he never came. One evening I noticed that Harry was grave and absent. He sat staring at the fire, with his elbows on his knees, and his head resting on his two hands. He never said a word, and looked drearily moody. I thought this might be in consequence of some advice I had been giving him, and I said:

"'Have you spoken to your uncle yet?'

"'About my prospects? No, auntie.'

"He called me auntie now. I laid my hand on his arm, and looked down in his handsome face.

"'My dear lad,' I said, 'your uncle once said to me, "Let us make men of them," and he has spared no expense on you two boys. You have travelled and seen the world. You have studied all that can be studied by young men of your years, and you know a great deal more than most young men know. You are good classic scholars; you speak several foreign languages; you have a fair knowledge of abstract and natural sciences. You have both had a princely education, but remember that Henry, if he knows all these things by no means so well as you do, has a kingdom waiting for him, and that you have not.'

"'Auntie, I can always join some exploring expedition,' he replied, coolly. 'I have no profession; but Africa, or the north-pole, is open to me.'

"He had already spoken of this thing, but Mr. de Lusignan would not listen to him, and I thought he had given it up. I felt quite scared at hearing it mentioned again.

"'Are you thinking of it?' I asked.

"'I am, auntie, more than ever.'

"I gave him a look, and I seemed to read his face as though it had been a book.

"'You have a trouble?'

"'I have, auntie,' he replied.

"He said no more; but, all at once, I guessed the truth—my Harry's trouble was love. My boys were no longer children, and to one of them, or to both, that trouble, the great trouble of youth, had come. You look at me, Mignonne, and your young eyes brighten. You think there is a love-story coming. A love-story there was, of course, a sad one in its progress, a tragic one in its close; but I cannot tell it to you. I saw it as we see a landscape through a mist, a green glimpse here and there, then a great white blank. After what Harry had told me, I could not help watching both him and Henry. I saw no change in my nephew. He was a good-hearted, honest young man, but he was not impulsive, and his

imperturbable fair face told me nothing. About a fortnight after Harry had spoken to me, he came again to my room. He stood for a while by the fireplace, gazing down at the blazing coals; then, suddenly looking up, with his rich, brown eyes full upon mine, he said:

"Auntie, my trouble is getting very heavy."

"But I did not ask him what that trouble was. Since he was silent, it was that he could not speak. I sometimes fancied that Henry and he liked the same girl, and that my Harry had lost the day, and Henry had won it. And yet how could this be? Save that one was rich and the other poor, there could be no comparison between the two cousins. Henry was handsome and good-natured, but cold and inert; and my Harry had the fervor, the passion, the chivalrous turn which can best charm a woman's heart, be she young or old. It would, indeed, be a marvel of marvels if he had failed, and Henry had succeeded. However this might be, I would have given any thing to know who the girl was, but I never had the least clew. I concluded, and I believe with truth, that I had never seen her; but how and where had they met her? It was very strange and perplexing. Stranger still it would have seemed, to one who did not know them as I did, that this rivalry, if it existed, should produce no change in their friendship; but, to me, that was the simplest thing of all.

"A few weeks had gone by, when Mr. de Lusignan came to my sitting-room one morning. His face was white, and, without saying a word, he put an open letter in my hand. It was a note, unsigned, in a woman's handwriting, and it ran thus:

"Tell him that he must come and see her to-day, but that he must by no means repeat to her what I said to you last night."

"These were the exact words. I have not forgotten one of them. I dare say they meant very little, and were not worth remembering; but they ruined my boy's prospects, and cost him his life. Little wonder is it that they remained on my mind forever.

"This note is dated Wednesday, as you see," said Mr. de Lusignan, "and the post-mark on the envelop proves that it was received by Harry, to whom it was directed, at a post-office in the city, on Thursday last. The last night, alluded to in the note, is therefore last Tuesday evening. That evening Henry spent at home with us, and Harry was out till twelve. He had been to see Prof. Clarke, he told us the next day. It is very plain to me, and, I dare say, as plain to you, that Harry saw some one besides the professor on that

evening. It is plain to me that he is some one's messenger or go-between in a matter concerning some woman or other. Do you suspect or not that some one to be my son?"

"I could not answer him one word.

"I see you do," he continued, taking back the letter. "Well, I am fond of Harry, but let him look to himself. I have not forgotten Fontainebleau. Let him look to himself."

"With that he left me. I feared the worst, and the worst came. I wonder why I tell you all this, Mignonne? It is a sad story at the best. But you will find through life that people will come to you with their troubles, past or present. You have a wistful, listening face, that promises sympathy and invites confidence.

"Well, it is useless to linger over all this. Harry, on being taxed with the note which his uncle had found in the hall, denied nothing and confessed nothing, beyond the fact that this note was addressed to him, and not to his cousin. I was not present, but I can imagine how he bore himself, silent, obstinate, and respectful. Henry, on being questioned, flatly denied all connection with the writer of the note, and declared he could not imagine what all this meant. His father did not believe him, nor did I; and the end of it all was that Harry was banished—sent adrift on the world with a hundred pounds in his pocket, and forbidden all intercourse with Henry. To insure obedience, Mr. de Lusignan took us both to Germany.

"For six weary months I did not see my Harry. He wrote to me every week. He was doing well; he was a good chemist, and a large firm had secured his services at a fair salary. He had been reared expensively; but his tastes were simple, and he seemed satisfied with his lot. Of his uncle and Henry he never spoke.

"Matters were not going on well between father and son all this time. Harry, though Mr. de Lusignan never suspected it, had kept Henry's temper under, and made him amenable to authority; he was the one strong link between these two, and, when he was gone, they snapped asunder. Their life now became one perpetual jar, and one day when I was out they had a serious difference, of which I always suspected Harry to have been the innocent cause. I noticed how sulky and defiant Henry looked that evening. The next morning we missed him; he was gone, leaving a note for me, in which he simply said that he could bear this life no longer. This was the final parting between Mr. de Lusignan and the son whom he had cherished so fondly."

"Did they never meet again, mademoiselle?" I asked.

"Never," she sadly answered. "The next news we had of Henry was that he had gone to America. We returned to England at once. My first act was to see Harry. He could, or he would, tell me nothing of his cousin. Yet to his door Mr. de Lusignan laid all the blame of his son's flight. 'He has been my boy's ruin throughout,' he said, bitterly; and from that conviction nothing I said could ever move him. A month after our return, Mr. de Lusignan said to me, 'Henry is married.' I had feared as much all along, but I was greatly startled, and, wishing to doubt, asked him how he knew it. 'I will tell you all about it later,' he answered. He never did, for the end came, and the subject was not broached again between us till last night. Henry soon came to grief in New York, and wrote to tell me his troubles, but said nothing of being married. I spoke to his father. 'Let him come back,' he said; and Henry, who had got rather tired of his liberty, consented to return. But, as if father and son never could agree, the boat he was to come by became a subject of contention between them. Mr. de Lusignan insisted that his son should return on board the *Phoenix*, the captain of which was one of his oldest friends; and Henry so resented the idea of being placed under a sort of guardianship, that he wrote to me, 'I will rather not return than come back on board the *Phoenix*.' His father was obstinate, however, and he had to yield.

"The *Phoenix* was on her way home, when I got a note from Harry, asking me to call upon him. He had much to tell me, he said. I went to his rooms in Great Russell Street, and, as I sat in the pleasant front-parlor, looking out at the British Museum opposite, I little thought what that 'much' could be. Presently he came in, looking bright, cheerful, and rather flushed.

"'Auntie,' he said, laying his hand on my arm, and looking down in my face, 'I am going away, and I could not go without bidding you good-by.'

"My heart sank within me. 'And where are you going?' I asked. 'Not to America, I hope.'

"'Oh! no; I am going with O'Donnell.'

"O Mignonne, you cannot guess what that answer was to me. I dare say you have never heard of O'Donnell, and of his great exploring expedition in Australia. I knew very little about it then, but I knew enough to cry out in sudden anguish:

"'O Harry, Harry, why do you do this?'

"He did not answer me at once. When he spoke, he said:

"'Do you know that I have seen uncle? No. Well, then, I have seen him often of late. It was he who sought me. Auntie, I have not, I never had, any share in those portions of Henry's conduct which may have displeased his father; but I failed to convince him that such was the case. I owe to my uncle all I am, and it is hard that he, of all men, should reproach and suspect me. So hard did I find it that I said to him once, 'Shall I leave England, and thus convince you I am not leading Henry astray?' He took me at my word; and, knowing my old bent, he suggested I should go out with O'Donnell. I consented. I dare say it is all pride, auntie, but if uncle chooses that I should thus pay my debt to him, why should I grudge the cost? Only I do not think that all will be well between him and Henry when I am gone.'

"I looked at my darling with pining eyes. I seemed to know that I should never see him again.

"'Do you like to go?' I asked.

"'I like it!' he said, his eyes kindling. 'I have always liked it. Auntie, can you not understand that the struggle of man against savage Nature, which is the wondrous attraction of "*Robinson Crusoe*," and has made it a book for all time, is also the spell of exploring adventure? It is something to see that old mother of ours through some other medium than that of tilled fields, however rich or fertile, or of forests planted by man, however grand and ancient! There must be wondrous music in the roar of nameless rivers flowing through pathless wastes. Every step on is a conquest; every step back may be death! And then to fall asleep by smouldering watch-fires, with the quiet stars above; and to dream of home, of cottages, of ivy-clad churches, ruins, cities; and to waken and hear the howl of wild beasts, ravenous for, yet fearful of man. Auntie, it is a grand life!'

"'And so you are glad to go?' I said, with tears in my eyes.

"'Even if I were not,' he answered, 'it would be too late to hang back.'

"After this, he spoke again of the expedition with ardor and enthusiasm. Still it seemed to me that something, which I could not define, ailed him.

"'Harry, what is it?' I asked. 'There is something on your mind—what is it?'

"He looked at me very earnestly. His lips parted, as if to speak, but he shook his head.

"'Not now,' he said—'later.'

"That 'later' never came. We were to meet again, but we did not. This was the last time that my eyes rested on my darling. We left town for a short time, but O'Donnell hastened the departure of the expedition, and my Harry was gone when we came back. He left a kind letter for me, but there was not a word in it concerning that trouble which I had read in his face.

"This was in spring, and the Phoenix was on her way home. We were in Hempstead again, and on a calm, gray evening I sat in my room thinking of the dear boy with whom I had so often looked at that prospect of green foreground, and hazy mass of London below, when Mr. de Lusignan came in. I could not see his face well in the dim twilight, but it seemed to me that his step was very heavy.

"Any news of the Phoenix?' I asked, for I knew he had gone to town to inquire.

"Yes,' he answered, in a strange voice; 'the Phoenix was burned at sea three days back!'

"How I heard him; what he said after this; how we both bore it, I cannot tell you now, Mignonne. I remember that evening as an awful blank, full of heart-sickening horror. For the news was cruelly true. We had not the relief of a moment's doubt, of a second's hope. The Phoenix was burned at sea, and the two men of her crew who survived and brought the tidings, both saw my poor nephew leap desperately into the sea to escape the raging fire behind him. They saw that sea close over his head, and heard his last despairing shriek. Yes! that was the end of my sister's child, and Mr. de Lusignan's son.

"I can talk of these things now, but Mr. de Lusignan cannot. I am nearer to death, and to the loved ones we have both lost, than he is, by some years. I am going down-hill, and he is climbing still, or has scarcely ceased doing so. That journey, which, to him, still looks endless, seems a very short one to me. And yet—and yet, Mignonne," she ceased, and a great rush of tears clouded her blue eyes; but she soon shook them away, and said, in a low, calm voice, "I have not much more to say. When the first passion of sorrow has spent itself, there comes a dreary time, of which strangers say, 'that you are getting over it.' Getting over it!—well, let it be. We were both in that mood when the news of Harry's death came. I can speak of that too. He had joined O'Donnell, as I told you. That O'Donnell was a man of unmatched daring and unflinching courage; he robbed me of my darling, but he was a hero, if ever there was one. He neglected nothing to insure the

success of his expedition, and was powerfully aided. Money came into him from every quarter. Mr. de Lusignan gave a large sum; camels were brought from Asia as more likely to endure fatigue than horses, and when O'Donnell started, his little band consisted of picked men as brave as himself. But it was an awful undertaking. My heart sinks when I think of what these men went through. The very camels could not bear the fatigue; little wonder is it if one after another the explorers died. They died after suffering all that men can suffer of hunger, sickness, and thirst. One by one they dropped off on the way home. Three who survived were met by another expedition that had been sent out to look for them; but neither O'Donnell nor my Harry was among them. O'Donnell died of fever, and Henry was killed in an encounter with the natives. When I read this dreary story in the *Times* one morning, I thought I must have expired with grief—but I did not—I did not, I am living still, though I shall never see my Harry again. All Mr. de Lusignan said, was—'I made Henry return by the Phoenix, and he was drowned. I made Harry go with O'Donnell, and he was killed!' He did not add another word; but, surely, never was self-condemnation more bitter than this!

"And now, Mignonne," she added, rising, "let us go home. You know why I am so familiar with this place. Some of my happiest days were spent in these gardens, in that forest. The wish to brave and conquer his gnawing sorrow has brought Mr. de Lusignan here, but to us both the place is haunted. Wherever we go, our boys are with us; we see their laughing faces through the trees, we hear their gay young voices echoing among the rocks. It is a keen ordeal, but there is sweetness in it too; and if it should be the means of discovering my poor nephew's child, surely Providence itself must have led us by the hand. Well, you know my story. If there must be a romance in every woman's life, you know mine—a boy's love. The two children, who were once so dear to me, had scarcely reached man's estate when they were taken from me. The sea keeps one, the sands of the Australian wastes hold the other—the last, the best, the dearest!—and I, who should have gone before, have been left to pray night and morning for their poor souls, and say, 'God's will be done!'"

CHAPTER VIII.

I FELT like one in a dream, as we walked home through the sunny streets. This was the first bit of romance in real life that had come to me. It was tragic enough; but youth is not afraid of sorrow, and Mademoiselle Aubrey's tale had a touch of mystery that charmed me.

When we passed through the open gate of the Fair Gabrielle—I did not care quite so much about it now—we found Mr. de Lusignan walking up and down in front of the house, and smoking a cigar.

"Well!" said his sister-in-law, standing still before him. She spoke with evident emotion, and I felt my heart beating.

"Well!" replied my guardian, throwing away the end of his cigar, and still walking up and down. "Mrs. Smith is either some other Mrs. Smith, or the most impenetrable of women. She has a maid called Watkins, a stolid, impassible, mulish kind of girl, with whom I had the honor of holding a five-minutes' conversation, while I was entertaining Master Smith by showing him my watch at the door of Ganne's. Mrs. Smith is a widow, and Mr. Smith"—he laid marked emphasis on the name—"died of consumption two years ago. So says, and evidently believes, Watkins. While we were thus discoursing, Mrs. Smith came dressed for a walk. She took the child by the hand, and looked at me with her dark-blue eyes—kind eyes they were, but not eyes that told you much. I introduced myself, and took the liberty of asking if Mrs. Smith was not related to a connection of mine, Lusignan Smith. 'I never heard the name before,' she answered, with British coldness, and, bowing with the most freezing politeness, she walked away. The child looked after me, but neither Mrs. Smith nor Watkins honored me with a second glance."

All this Mr. de Lusignan said quite composedly, pausing now and then in his up-and-down promenade, but otherwise showing very little interest in what he said. He was a keenly-sensitive man, and, because he was so, he hated betraying his feelings. One thing I noticed, and it nettled that self-love which is so strong in the young—he never seemed, even in the faintest manner, to direct his discourse to me. I stood there hearing, because it would have been inconvenient to exclude me from the secret, but my importance as a listener was equal to that of the flag on which I stood.

"Well," remarked Mademoiselle Aubrey, after a brief pause, "you were prepared for denial, were you not?"

"I was, and therefore got what I was prepared for. And yet," he added, looking at his sister-in-law, with a sudden change of manner, "that woman is my son's widow. Her countenance never moved, her look never flinched, her lip never quivered when I uttered his name, but she just clutched the child's hand, and drew him more closely to her side, as I spoke; and, I say it again, she is my son's widow, and her child is his child."

"What will you do now?"

"I am not very sure what I shall begin by—I shall see"

I believe he so far remembered me as not to care to say more about his intentions.

"And if she should go away?" suggested Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"She will not. I am no physiognomist, or that woman loves danger for danger's own sake. She is as intrepid as she is handsome, and, feeling perfectly secure, rather likes to brave me. Let her. If I have got truth on my side, as I believe I have, I shall prevail over her yet."

He did not seem inclined to say more, and Mademoiselle Aubrey and I entered the house together. I was burning with curiosity and excitement.

"Well," I said, breathlessly, to my companion, as soon as we got out of ear-shot, "what do you think, mademoiselle?"

"I think, as your guardian says, my dear, that Mrs. Smith is Henry's widow; but I also think it will be a hard task to detect such a woman, if she is bent on concealment. How can Mr. de Lusignan get hold of her? I doubt if even English law gives him any power over her, and assuredly French law can have nothing to say between Mr. de Lusignan and a lady who denies all knowledge of him."

"Do you know, mademoiselle," I sagely remarked, pausing at the door of her room, which we had now reached, "that I think it must be all a mistake! Why should she hide from Mr. de Lusignan, and keep his little grandson from him, when he is quite a rich man, you know?"

I thought myself very worldly wise in making this prudential remark, but Mademoiselle Aubrey only smiled.

"My dear," she said, "the motives which rule the conduct of men and women are not always strictly logical, and, what is more, they do not always lie on the surface, so that he who runs may read. My poor nephew had good reason to hide his marriage, and call himself Lusignan Smith; and so may Louisa Jones have had rea-

sons of her own for secrecy—reasons which may still exist, though Henry is no more.”

This new view of the subject bewildered me. I had heard of wards in chancery. I had no exact idea of what a ward in chancery was, but I believed that chancery was a hard guardian to deal with, and, for all I knew, might punish its disobedient wards in some very harsh manner. I dare say I should have made some such suggestion to my companion, but she was tired, or did not care, perhaps, to discuss the matter on the staircase, for with a kind nod she entered her room, and left me to my conjectures concerning this second mystery. True, she had only hinted that it was probable; but I quickly jumped to the conclusion that it was certain. I now felt quite sure that Louisa Jones and Mrs. Smith were one; also that this double individual had a story which I longed to know all the more that I had not the faintest clew to it. I had but a vague, dull story of my own, and so I had plenty of time and thought to spare for the stories of other people. My mind was full of this particular one just then, and, because it was so, I took comparatively little interest in an incident which occurred while we were at dinner, and which, though it seemed to have no sort of relation to the matter uppermost in Mr. de Lusignan’s mind (and in mine), was nevertheless destined to influence it in a very remarkable manner.

The dining-room was on the ground-floor. It was a very wide and rather a bare room, with oak furniture and stiff-backed oak chairs. Our dinner was unusually late this evening, and we had lights before it was over; but the windows opposite which I sat remained open. When I got tired of looking at my guardian’s mobile brown face, and of speculating as to what his thoughts might be about—I did not know then that when a man is a bit of an epicure, as my guardian assuredly was, his dinner is never forgotten, whatever other absorbing topics may be in his mind—when, as I said, I got tired of this, I looked through the window facing my chair. I saw the old gate in the gray twilight, now deepening into night, and beyond its iron bars I caught a glimpse of the silent, lonely street. A postman was going by; he stopped at a gate opposite ours, and I saw him take out his little lantern—gas-lamps in Fontainebleau are, like angel-visits, few and far between—and flash its light on the letter he was going to deliver. Was he bringing one to me?—from James Carr, of course. No, he passed on. James was not writing yet. When would he write? I wondered. And so my thoughts were straying away from

the present time and visible things, when a sound of wheels and jingling bells, which had been coming up the street, ceased abruptly, and the railway-omnibus stopped at our gate. Neither of my two companions seemed to heed this; but my heart began to beat. I must have been crazy indeed, or the wild thought that James was coming could not have crossed my mind; but so it was, for a man alighted, a man with luggage, which the driver took down from the roof of the omnibus; a man who, having paid his fare, rang the bell, which pealed loud and clear as the omnibus drove away.

“What’s that?” said my guardian, sharply. His back was to the window, and he had seen nothing; besides, he was very much engaged with a *canard au petits pois*, which was really very nice.

“It’s—it’s a gentleman coming here,” I faltered, still thinking of James.

“What!”

“He has come with luggage,” I resumed, feeling impelled by perverse fate to lay the full enormity of the case before him.

“With what?”

I did not answer. I had no need to do so. A servant had answered the bell, and was ushering the stranger in.

“Prenez donc garde, Hermance,” said a French male voice, which was neither musical nor young. “Là, bien—c’est ça.”

I am afraid I breathed a relieved sigh on finding out that it was not James after all. Hermance and the stranger, a short, stout man, who breathed heavily, were entering the house together. The girl carried a small valise; our unknown visitor bore a camp-stool, an easel, and a painting-box, all strapped together. My sight, which was keen, enabled me to distinguish these particulars; but Mr. de Lusignan, who was short-sighted, vainly peered into the darkness—he could make out nothing.

“Is there really some one coming here?” asked Mademoiselle Aubrey, in an amazed tone.

“It would seem so,” coolly answered my guardian; and he rang the bell.

Hermance herself answered it, after a little delay.

“Who is the gentleman that has just come?” asked my guardian, speaking with a composure that surprised me.

“Oh! that is Monsieur Renaud,” answered the girl, with a half-smile at the question.

“I am sorry to say, my good girl, that your answer leaves my mind in the dark. Who is Monsieur Renaud?”

"He is Baron Regnier's friend."

"And Baron Regnier is the owner of this house. But, you see Baron Regnier having let this house to me, and not being in it himself at the present time, I cannot see why Monsieur Renaud should come to it."

I could see from the face of Hermance that my guardian's bantering manner puzzled her extremely. However, she had a good fund of French coolness of her own, for she answered composedly:

"Monsieur Renaud is very fond of Fontainebleau."

"Is he? How good of him! I suppose he is fond of this house too?"

"Oh! yes; he always comes here," replied Hermance, still very cool. "He has come here for the last ten years."

"In—deed! Well, I am sorry to disappoint Monsieur Renaud in the eleventh year of his reign, but here he cannot come for this one year. I have taken this house, and I mean to use it all myself."

Hermance looked bewildered.

"There are so many bedrooms in it," she said, remonstratively.

"Very true; but I am like the ancient tyrant, I mean to sleep in every one in turns; and I shall sleep this night in the very one to which you have shown Monsieur Renaud. Please to go and tell him so. With my compliments, of course; for I beg you to be perfectly civil to Monsieur Renaud."

Spite this admonition, Hermance looked very reluctant to deliver my guardian's message; but as he kept his eye upon her, evidently expecting her to go, she went. Her step up the stairs, however, was hesitating and slow. She soon came back to us, and as she stood before Mr. de Lusignan, who leaned back in his chair, looking at her, I noticed a spark of mischief in Hermance's black eyes. Without giving her time to speak, Mr. de Lusignan said:

"Well, is Monsieur Renaud gone?"

Hermance looked very demure.

No, Monsieur Renaud was not gone.

"But is going?" significantly said Mr. de Lusignan.

I fancied that he was beginning to lose his temper. Hermance shook her head. No, Monsieur Renaud was not going.

"Perhaps you will tell me exactly what he said?" This was spoken very curtly.

With the delightful alacrity which some people feel when it is their pleasant task to utter disagreeable truths, Hermance glibly replied:

"Oh! Monsieur Renaud laughed a little on receiving monsieur's message, and said monsieur was an Anglais and an original."

"Did he? And pray, what else did he say?"

My guardian looked very ominous now, but Hermance seemed neither frightened nor disconcerted, as she said:

"He asked if monsieur would be so good as to look at his agreement."

"My agreement, or rather my lease, of this house has nothing to do with Monsieur Renaud," sharply answered Mr. de Lusignan. Nevertheless, he opened his pocket-book, and began looking among its contents. He soon found the paper he was searching for, and, drawing the lamp toward him, read it attentively.

I saw, as he read, his thick, dark eyebrows uplifted in puzzled surprise; then he burst out laughing, and tossed the paper on the table.

"Well?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"Well, I find by this lease that I did give Baron Regnier the right to keep a certain attic on the second floor, which, in my wisdom, and knowing that the said baron was in Italy, I concluded must be to hold trunks and other lumber. Well, well; even old travellers commit mistakes. How old is Monsieur Renaud?" he added, addressing Hermance.

"Oh! sixty, at the very least," she promptly answered.

"Venerable! All right. Go, therefore, to Monsieur Renaud, my good girl, and tell him that I committed a mistake, and beg a thousand pardons!"

I fancy that, when she delivered this message, Hermance kindly added to it the question concerning Monsieur Renaud's age, which my guardian had put to her. Mr. de Lusignan was sipping his coffee in the drawing-room an hour later, when Monsieur Renaud sent in a civil message. "He asked to have the honor of speaking to monsieur."

"Tell Monsieur Renaud I shall be most happy," was the affable reply, and presently Monsieur Renaud made his appearance.

He was a short, broad man, with flowing white hair, clear blue eyes, and an open countenance, which it did one good to look at. I liked him much, and I saw that he produced a most favorable impression on my two companions.

"Monsieur," said he, addressing my guardian with that easy French politeness, of which the true charm is that it is neither stiff nor oppressive, "I come to apologize for my unconscious intrusion on your privacy. But, as you see, monsieur, I am an old man, and quite harmless, I as-

sure you. I have only one hobby, painting, which takes me out-of-doors. I go out with the sunrise, live in the forest, and, as I cannot stay more than ten days, I really think, this house being so large a one, that we need never meet."

"In that case, I should assuredly be a loser," graciously said my guardian.

Monsieur Renaud bowed, and was rising to go, but Mr. de Lusignan detained him. Perhaps, he was not sorry, harmless though Monsieur Renaud described himself to be, to know more about him. So far as I could see, he found out nothing. Monsieur Renaud looked the most open of men, he had the frankest laugh, the clearest eye, but of himself, or rather of his position, business, and doings, out of Fontainebleau, he said not one word. Mr. de Lusignan looked puzzled, when he left us at the end of an hour.

"He has not the employé-type upon him," he remarked, musingly, "nor yet the rentier-type, and certainly not the careless rich-man's type. What is he?"

I seldom answered any remark my guardian made, so I kept to myself any stray fancies I might have concerning Monsieur Renaud. I did not care much about him, to say the truth. I was taken up with Mrs. Smith, little suspecting that, between the unknown beauty at Barbison and this elderly Frenchman with the flowing white hair, a secret link, of which neither knew, was being even then woven by the hands of Fate. Still, to say something, I suppose, I remarked, addressing Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had listened to and looked at our visitor with shrewd attention, "What do you think Monsieur Renaud is, mademoiselle?"

"I think, my dear, that he does not wish to say it, and that it matters very little to us," she replied, pleasantly, but so plainly that I felt reproved; for, though she was the best of women, she had been a governess, and could not help lecturing.

CHAPTER IX.

"We shall walk to Mount Ussy to-day," said Mademoiselle Aubrey to me the next morning, "and you may bring your sketch-book, Mignonne."

This was delightful, and, to make it more delightful still, we were to go alone. I liked my guardian after a certain fashion, but he had frightened the shy spirit of youth within me, and I always felt more at my ease when he was not

by. So, after luncheon, we walked leisurely, Mademoiselle Aubrey and I, through the cool and green forest to Mount Ussy.

O fair solitude of rock, and fern, and tree, shall I ever see you again, I wonder? And, if I do, shall I go into the raptures in which I went then? Nature has two sorts of lovers, her familiars, who live in daily intercourse with her, who see her suns rise as well as her suns set, who behold her through drenching rains, who look at her withering before autumn blasts, and lying cold and dead beneath shroud-like frost and snow. These love her with a close, keen, silent love, the love of bridegroom and bride; these are flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone; they cannot live, unless they breathe her air summer and winter, unless they see her daily, in every season, under every aspect. But that love, though so deep, is no extravagant fondness, which shows itself in speech, laughter, or tears. The other lovers of Nature know very little about her. They were born and bred in the city-worlds of brick and mortar, and, when they behold Nature face to face, grand, wild, and fair, their joy is no calm delight, but an almost painful rapture. They are very ignorant, they may not know an oak from a beech tree, the song of the linnet from that of the thrush, but they have a keener sense of the beauty of Nature than if they had been nursed on her bosom, and clasped all day long to her heart.

I was one of these. I was sadly ignorant. A peasant-girl would have laughed at some of my blunders, but I felt, to my heart's-core, the loveliness of all I saw, from the commonest weed to the most stately tree. My enthusiasm, which could not, unfortunately, be silent, must have been either very wearisome or very amusing to my companion.

"O mademoiselle! look at those rocks," I cried. "Look at the rich velvet of that moss creeping upon them. And then the deep dark-red and orange of those huge stones. And those ferns, so tall, so green! And that tree! O mademoiselle? there never was such a tree, surely!"

After crossing a rocky defile, we had reached an open space, enclosed by rocks of most varied shape and aspect. Here rose some noble trees, and preëminent among them was an oak, which, though shorn of its great height, and shattered by many a storm, was still conspicuous for its huge trunk and far-spreading boughs.

"Yes, it is a noble tree," she replied, her bright-blue eyes lit with admiration—"it is the Charlemagne, the oldest tree in all the forest. Draw it, Mignonne."

"Oh! will you—will you really stay here with me if I do?" I cried.

"Yes, Mignonne; I have got my love-story, you know, and my work, should I get tired of it."

Dear mademoiselle! I wondered then why you were so fond of love-tales—why there was always one lying on your pillow at home, or hidden in your pocket when we went out. It seemed very strange to me then that a stout, gray-haired lady of sixty should delight in the drama of a passion which youth most inconsistently vows to be eternal, and yet restricts to its own green spring-season. I have lived to grow wiser; I have lived to know that love, whether granted or denied, is the story of every heart. Wives and mothers care comparatively little for romances. Why should they? Their own story, sad or joyful, is enough for them; but maids, old or young, are not so indifferent. These look back and think, "Thus it might have been!" and these look forward, and smile and think, "Thus it will be." But that wisdom, such as it is, was hidden from me then, and I wondered at Mademoiselle Aubrey as she sat down on a mossy bank in the shade, and, settling her spectacles on her nose, began to read.

I walked round the Charlemagne, and, having weighed the important matter deeply, placed myself in what I considered the most favorable position, and began to draw. At first my task absorbed me, then, little by little, those subtle powers of Nature which sooner or later master us when we enter her domain, drew my mind away, and made my pencil flag. A sort of awe crept over me. The day was gusty, the spot was very wild. Sitting thus midst savage rocks, with mighty trees growing from among them, and holding them fast with their claw-like roots, and spreading their mighty arms above them, as if to say, "We have conquered you, and you are ours," and listening to the loud, strong wind above them—strong and loud as the coming of the tide by the sea-shore—the world felt very far away. I am, and have always been, a coward, and I was going to ask Mademoiselle Aubrey whether we should not leave this lonely spot, when my guardian and Monsieur Renaud, stepping round some rocks, suddenly appeared before us.

No eagle ever pounced on harmless dove more swiftly than Monsieur Renaud pounced on my poor sketch-book. In a second he was at my back, looking over my shoulder.

"Allow me," he said.

Allow him! Oh! that I could have forbid-

den, and not allowed! I was so disconcerted that Mr. de Lusignan burst out laughing.

"Thank me, Mignonne," he said, mischievously. "I met monsieur, and asked him to be so good as to come and look at your work. It will be of the greatest advantage to you to have monsieur's criticism and advice."

He spoke in French, and Monsieur Renaud made a polite demur, but nevertheless criticised my Charlemagne very liberally. The trunk was too thick—that bough was too short—the foliage was heavy. "I should like to feel the breeze going through," said Monsieur Renaud, with a graceful wave of his hand, which he no doubt intended for the breeze. "Yes, mademoiselle, there is a want of air in your foliage."

I felt rather depressed by this want of air in my foliage, but knowing that, if I looked as I felt, I should look sulky, and wishing, on the contrary, to look sprightly and at ease, I thanked Monsieur Renaud for his good advice.

"I will show you my Charlemagne," he said, unfastening a huge portfolio which he carried strapped to his back, and opening it with great alacrity. "I did him last year sitting on that very same stone, mademoiselle."

Revenge was said of old to be so sweet that the gods kept it for themselves as the choicest of morsels. There must be a dreadful truth in the saying, or I should never have been so glad as I was when I saw Monsieur Renaud's Charlemagne. Deluded man! Did he call these sticks boughs, and did he think to impose upon me these dots of blue sky, picked round with bits of green—did he think, I say, to impose them upon me as that glorious world of air which surrounds us with a quivering sea of light? If my Charlemagne was bad, what was this? The thought brought back my good-humor, and I could look, with my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had now joined us, at the contents of Monsieur Renaud's portfolio. Suddenly I gave a start, for the wind had brought down to me the prattling voice of a child from among the rocks above us, and another voice had called out in English, "Harry!" Unconscious of the meaning these words had for us, Monsieur Renaud, half-shutting his eyes, and holding out one of his sketches at arm's-length, said, complacently:

"That is a bit from the eagle's eyrie. There is vigor in these rocks, as you see."

"Ah! to be sure," I answered, "I see."

But never was confession of "seeing" more fallacious than mine. I saw nothing of the kind, for all the time I was looking up the path.

She came first, stepping down the rocks with

the grace and dignity of a young nymph; she walked straight toward us, with downcast eyes, which she suddenly raised as she had to pass by us. I did not see my guardian, but I felt that her look and his met at that moment. I was breathless with excitement, and I read her face, as far as a face of that still beauty—kept thus still, I felt, because she willed it so—could be read. A faint, subtle change came over it, a sudden flash in the deep-blue eyes, that died, as it had come, in a moment, a quivering motion of the dainty lips, something between scorn and defiance, that passed away even as I gazed.

"This way, Watkins," she said, turning her graceful head back, "we shall sit down here."

And she went and sat on the mossy bank which Mademoiselle Aubrey had forsaken. Ay, she sat there, with Mr. de Lusignan looking alternately at her and at the child, who now came, borne in the arms of the stolid Watkins, over whose shoulder he stared at us with solemn black eyes. If there was danger in Mr. de Lusignan's presence, this woman braved it; if he was her enemy, she scorned to fly from him.

I could not help looking at my guardian; and unconscious of my observation, he, too, let me read his swarthy face. He felt braved and defied; every one of his features quivered with passionate emotion; his mobile lips twitched nervously; his dark eyes burned with resentment, and yet with a strange tenderness, too. Mademoiselle Aubrey was pale but collected. I fancied that they avoided looking at each other. And all the time Monsieur Renaud, who was short-sighted, and to whom the beautiful Mrs. Smith and the plain Watkins were equally indifferent, went on displaying his sketches to my admiring gaze. Mrs. Smith, meanwhile, had taken out her work, and was hemming a cambric frill with perfect composure. Now and then she looked after Watkins, who had wandered away with the child, but it was plain, by the steadiness with which she wielded her needle and thread, that our vicinity was no objection to the lovely young widow.

Mr. de Lusignan could not emulate her coolness. He became flushed, then pale; he took out a cigar, and threw it away; he ruthlessly destroyed with his stick a lovely group of young ferns growing in the rocks close by; then, after standing still two minutes, he took out his watch, turned to Mademoiselle Aubrey, and said:

"I find I shall be in time for the next train; the station is close by, you know. Do not be surprised if I stay a few days away."

He bowed to Monsieur Renaud, but forgot my

existence, and left us thus. Mrs. Smith and he were at war, and I do believe he had forgotten every thing save that contest. He had spoken in English, but perhaps she had not heard him. She went on hemming, and did not even give him a look as he passed by her; and yet it seemed to me as if she must know, as I knew, that this sudden departure concerned her. I was as sure of it as that I sat there listening to that prosy Monsieur Renaud, who could not weary of "foreground," and "aërial perspective," and "masses of foliage," that Mr. de Lusignan had only left us to deal this handsome and impenetrable Mrs. Smith a surer blow.

"And what do you think of this tree, mademoiselle?" asked Monsieur Renaud, holding up one of his sketches for my examination.

I was at the age when one would as soon think of expiring on the spot as of uttering disagreeable truths, so Heaven only knows how I should have got out of this dilemma, for I did not like Monsieur Renaud's tree at all, when a cough behind made us both turn round. Watkins, who had been wandering among the rocks, stood close to us, looking at Monsieur Renaud's drawing with the stupid, stolid look of a pair of full blue eyes. The boy was in her arms; his black eyes were heavy and dull, and his pale cheek lay on the girl's shoulder. Monsieur Renaud looked at the child, and I was struck with the altered meaning of his face as he looked. It was shrewd and observant, not anxious, by any means; but so keenly attentive that even the stolid Watkins opened her eyes and her mouth.

"Does that child belong to the lady who is sitting there beyond?" he asked.

But French was not among the accomplishments of Watkins, who only went on staring at him. Monsieur Renaud put down his portfolio, and walked straight up to Mrs. Smith. He accosted her with stately and old-fashioned courtesy, standing bareheaded before her as he spoke.

"Madame," he said, "you are, I presume, the mother of that little fellow in the *bonne's* arms?"

Mrs. Smith put down her hemming leisurely, and, looking up at him with mistrustful surprise, she slowly answered in French:

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Then, I hope that you have got a carriage waiting for you, for you must take that child away *at once*." He laid marked emphasis on the words. "If you know of no doctor in Fontainebleau, send for Dr. Gesson, Rue de la Cloche. But, stop, he might be out; and you have not a moment to lose." He took out his pocket-book, wrote something on a page which he tore out,

and handed it to her. "Do this at once," he said; "and then see Dr. Gesson."

Mrs. Smith had heard him like one petrified. But, as he put the paper into her hand, she started to her feet, and looked at Monsieur Renaud with scared eyes.

"Do you mean to say that my child is ill?" she asked, with a sort of anger in her pale, rigid face. "How dare you say it? Who are you?—who are you?"

"I am Dr. Renaud," he replied, gravely, uttering a name of European fame; "and I am sorry to say that your child has got the croup."

She uttered a cry, a low, sharp, wailing cry; then, swift as thought, she darted down the path, and, snatching the child from the arms of Watkins, she vanished with it among the rocks, followed, after a pause of amazement, by the bewildered nurse. Her departure was so sudden that it took us all by surprise. Monsieur, or, rather, Dr. Renaud, looked after her, then shook his head, and came back to us. He was quite composed, and I do believe he was going to show me his tree again, but Mademoiselle Aubrey went up to him, laid her hand on his arm, and said, impetuously:

"You are Dr. Renaud, the great child's doctor. Oh! why do you not follow that child, and try to save it? Go, you can still overtake them. Go, be quick!"

Her blue eyes flashed, and her lips quivered; for, though reason and will kept her calm, she was of a quick and vehement temper. Dr. Renaud looked bewildered for a moment, but, recovering his composure, he said, rather shortly:

"Excuse me, madame, but I am not here professionally. Of course, if I can help to save a child's life by timely warning, I do it; but it is Dr. Gesson's business to cure the sick of Fontainebleau, not mine."

As he said this, Dr. Renaud tied up the strings of his portfolio with rather a lofty air. Mademoiselle Aubrey had grown calm again.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I was too hasty; but that poor child's little face made me forget myself. Do you—do you think it can be saved?" she asked.

But Dr. Renaud would not commit himself. He raised his eyebrows, he pursed his lips. It was a very fatal disease, he confessed, but, if a good many children died with it, plenty were cured; and he had detained us long enough, and he had the honor to wish us both, madame and mademoiselle, a good-afternoon. With a very formal bow he left us.

"I was wrong—I frightened him," said Made-

moiselle Aubrey, looking after him. "I ought to have known better. But, oh! why was he so hard?" she added, with a rush of tears. "Why could he do nothing for poor Henry's child?—for it is Henry's child, I am sure of it, Mignonne—sure, sure! And yet it may die—it may die!"

She was once more quite agitated.

"And I, who thought that Monsieur Renaud so good-natured," I cried, in hot indignation. "Why, he must be a monster, mademoiselle—quite a monster. And he draws so badly, too. His trees are shocking. And to behave so! Why, it is as bad as murder!"

But it was not in Mademoiselle Aubrey's nature to be long partial or unjust. She sighed, and corrected herself again.

"I am too hasty—too hasty," she said. "Think of it, Mignonne, that poor man is worked hard from morning till night. There are no Sundays, no holidays for him; and he comes here for ten days, just to take that rest without which, perhaps, he could not go on working and doing good. He warned the child's mother, but there his duty ends. He has laid down his burden for a while; why do I grudge him that breathing-time?"

She was arguing with herself, because she was just; but, in her heart, she still felt half-angry with Dr. Renaud, for she was mortal. I had no such scruples. I was quite wrathful, and said so. I was also too much disturbed to go on drawing, so we rose to leave. As we passed the bank on which Mrs. Smith had sat, I picked up the little frill she had been hemming, and showed it to Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"Poor thing!" she said, with a pitiful look—"poor thing!"

Our dinner was quiet, but in the evening Mademoiselle Aubrey, with an unselfishness which I was too inexperienced to appreciate, did her best to entertain me. Her mind was full of trouble and care, yet she seemed to put both by, in order that I might not feel dull. It is very hard for sad thought to abide with youth, and, though I had pronounced poor Dr. Renaud a monster, I came to the conclusion, on seeing Mademoiselle Aubrey so easy in her mind, as I fancied, that the child was not so very ill, after all, and that, somehow or other, he would be sure not to die. So, while Mademoiselle Aubrey was pacing her room up and down that night, in a fever of anxiety, I laid my head on my pillow, and fell fast asleep.

But even the sound, dreamless sleep of eighteen, which is so sweet and so deep, could not resist that pealing of our great bell—it was more like a church-bell than like any thing else, deep,

full, and sonorous—which, toward midnight, startled all our quiet household. The clamor awoke a watch-dog, whose furious barking would have roused the dead in their graves. I jumped up in sudden terror, and, slipping on my dressing-gown, I opened my window, and looked out. The night was dark and sultry, a starless, stormy night. The window next mine was thrown open, and Mademoiselle Aubrey's voice asked, in a loud tone, who was there.

"Perhaps it is Mr. de Lusignan," I suggested, from my window.

The gate had not been opened yet, though a light was now moving in the window at the lodge, and the bell rang again so violently that a third window opened above us, and Dr. Renaud's voice asked, sharply:

"Is it fire? Because, if it is fire, just say so, and I shall dress, and if it is not I shall go back to bed."

No one answered this most reasonable question; but I heard Mademoiselle Aubrey open her door and go down-stairs. A sudden terror of I knew not what seized me, and, without heeding poor Dr. Renaud, who, after waiting a while, was saying, very testily, "Well, is it fire, or is it not?" I ran out after her.

"O mademoiselle, do not leave me!" I cried—"mademoiselle!" And, breathless with haste and fear, I flew down the stairs, and overtook her in the hall, just as the clamorous visitor, who had begun ringing a third time, was admitted by the gardener, after a brief parley.

"Do not be afraid, Mignonne," kindly said mademoiselle, as I took her hand in the darkness, and clung tremblingly to her; "I dare say it is your guardian."

But it was not. The gardener came toward us holding a lantern; in its light I saw the pale face of Mrs. Smith, with the dazzling rays flashing around it on a background of darkness, as one sees the Virgin in old pictures of the Holy Family in Bethlehem. But this was no joyful mother showing her babe to worshipping kings and shepherds, while the soft shadow of angel-wings broods over all. A face so woful, so death-like, as the one before me, I never yet had seen. She came straight up to us.

"I want to see that doctor," she said, in a voice which, though brief and clear, was very sweet and low, "now—this moment—I shall not leave the house till I have seen him."

"Come in," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey, holding out her hand to help her up the step, and, as she did so, I saw that Mrs. Smith carried something in her arms wrapped up in a shawl.

Mademoiselle Aubrey took the lantern from the gardener's hand, and entered the dining-room; Mrs. Smith followed; I went after them both, and left the door ajar. There was a sound of slippers on the stairs, and while Mademoiselle Aubrey was lighting the candle in one of the tall silver flambeaux which figured daily on our table, the voice of Dr. Renaud spoke testily in the hall.

"Will any one be so good as to tell me whether it is fire or not?"

"Oh no, it is not fire," answered the pert voice of Hermance—for the universal clamor had roused her too; "the gardener says it is a lady from Paris who wants monsieur."

"From Paris! Herc, take my nightcap, my good girl."

And, pushing the door open, Dr. Renaud entered the dining-room, flat candlestick in hand, and looking very like a benevolent mandarin in his huge flowered dressing-gown. He did not recognize Mrs. Smith, but stared doubtfully at her, bowing with a perplexed air. She went up to him, and, opening her shawl, held forth to him the child, who lay resting on her arms, breathing hoarsely.

"He is dying," she said, piteously—"dying, but you can save him, and you shall!"

Dr. Renaud frowned.

"Have you seen Dr. Gesson?" he asked, without giving the child a look.

"I have, and he is powerless. I have followed your prescriptions, and you see him—he is dying."

"There is nothing else to be done," said Dr. Renaud—"nothing, madame."

"There is. There is an operation which saves some children; why should it not save my child? Dr. Gesson will not attempt it; he says it is no use—no use. That is why I have brought him. I knew you would not come to me; but now that I have brought him, you cannot—man! you dare not deny me!"

Her voice, though still so sweet, was so imperious, that Dr. Renaud looked up at her in momentary amazement; but the look passed away in a second, and, putting down his light, he examined the little fellow with the closest and keenest attention. When he spoke, at length, we all hung on the words that fell from his lips—they were fatal and decisive.

"Dr. Gesson is right; an operation would be cruel and useless."

"Cruel!" she repeated, with a quivering of the lip that was most pitiful—"cruel! Oh! that is hard, but can he live without it?"

He was silent.

Her voice rang out clear and despairing.

"I ask if you, if Dr. Gesson, if any one, can save my child without that operation?"

Thus adjured, he answered—

"God can; man cannot."

"But what man can do, man shall do," she cried. "I know the operation is but the thousandth of a chance for him, but that chance my boy shall have. You, Dr. Renaud, shall perform that operation before I leave this house."

"That I will not," he most positively answered; "I will never inflict useless pain—on a child, especially."

She did not argue, but, putting the child in Mademoiselle Aubrey's arms, she went to the door, and, laying her back against it, she said, with a dreadful calmness that froze the blood in my veins—

"I tell you, sir, that you shall not leave this room till you have either killed or saved my child!"

A dead silence fell upon us. Never shall I forget that face of tragic beauty and despair. Dr. Renaud looked at her. Accustomed as he must have been to such scenes, he was deeply moved.

"Be it so," he said, "but, remember—"

"Hush!" she interrupted, with a shudder, "I can bear it, if it must be borne, but I cannot hear it spoken—I cannot!"

"Madame," said Dr. Renaud, addressing Mademoiselle Aubrey, "will you kindly be present, for I will have neither of those two ladies," he added, looking at Mrs. Smith and me.

I would not have been present for much, for, though I did not know what tracheotomy was, I felt sure that an operation must always be something dreadful; but though I was glad to be excluded, I thought that Mrs. Smith would resist—she did not. All her energy had spent itself in gaining her point; now that it was won, she was weakly submissive. She went up to the child lying in Mademoiselle Aubrey's arms, kissed it, and walked out into the dark night. I hurried out after her.

"Will you come up to my room?" I whispered.

"Thank you," she answered, in a low tone—it seemed as if we both feared to speak aloud, "a room would stifle me."

The night was oppressively hot. We walked up and down in front of the house, not exchanging one word, with nothing but the sound of the gravel crunching beneath our feet to break on the solemn stillness. The lights had vanished

from the dining-room, and the house was black again. Presently a man left it, and passing quickly by us, went out into the street. Mrs. Smith stood still, listening to his hurried steps.

"It is the gardener," I said.

"He has gone for Dr. Gesson," she replied, and again we walked up and down.

Her conjecture was correct. After a while the little side-door creaked on its hinges, and two men came in. We saw them from where we stood, but they did not see us. They entered the house, the door closed upon them, and all was still again; not a ray, not a sound, came from the dark house; the very garden-trees were silent and fast asleep. Now and then a faint breeze rustled through their drowsy leaves, as if they were dreaming. Do trees sleep or dream of something better and kinder than what man and Nature have granted to them? For, surely, there is a deeper life than we can ever fathom in all that fresh green growth with which earth is covered. That life, however, so mysterious, so far from us, never breaks on our solitude in hours of sorrow. It seemed to me then as if these dark trees added to the gloom and sadness of the black night. My heart sank within me; the minutes went by slow as hours. Never, surely, had the steps of Time been so heavy or so leaden as on that night. "Oh! if it could be all over!" I thought in my weariness. And it was all over at length. The door of the house opened, and Mademoiselle Aubrey appeared on the threshold with a light in her hand.

"You can come to him now," she said, as we went up to her. "I have put him in the room next to mine; and, though Mr. de Lusignan is not here, I can safely say that he would make you as welcome as I do."

In her loyalty I felt that my dear friend would tell Mrs. Smith whose guest she was. Did she not know it, or had she forgotten it in the passion of her fear, that as she looked up there came to her face of death-like paleness that look of vague, remote amazement?

CHAPTER X.

It was all over. The terror and the suspense had gone by, and the joy remained in all its happy surprise. The boy was saved, and Dr. Renaud frankly said to his mother:

"Your faith has done it."

They were still with us, for the child could not be removed, and Mrs. Smith had willingly ac-

cepted the hospitality which Mademoiselle Aubrey kindly pressed upon her. Mr. de Lusignan, little suspecting who was his guest, was still away, and we did not so much as know his whereabouts. Watkins even came to assist her mistress, whose temporary abode at the "Aigie Noir" was given up. For several days I saw little or nothing of our guest. Her whole time was devoted to her sick child, and she declined every assistance save such as Watkins could give her. In the beginning Mademoiselle Aubrey and I had volunteered to help her in nursing the little patient; but she thanked us a little coldly, I thought, and declined so positively that we did not renew our offer. I was rather affronted, but Mademoiselle Aubrey, ever indulgent, only said:

"A mother—a jealous mother, Mignonne. Well, I am not sure that I would have allowed any one to help me in nursing my boy."

While a shadow of danger hung over the child his mother did not leave him, even for one moment, to breathe a little fresh air in the garden; but, no sooner did she feel sure of his safety, than she changed completely. I was standing alone in the dining-room, pondering over the news which Dr. Renaud had just imparted to us, and wondering whether Mr. de Lusignan would return before Mrs. Smith had left us, when I heard a light step on the staircase. I looked, for the dining-room door was half-open, and saw Mrs. Smith coming down. She looked pale and worn, but was fully dressed for going out.

"Is it any thing you want for the child?" I asked eagerly, going out to meet her. "Shall I go and get it for you? You would rather stay with him, I know, and you may trust me. It is I who get all his medicines from the chemist's."

This was the exact truth; for Mademoiselle Aubrey had been suffering from a bad cold, and had sent me, under the safeguard of Hermance, to the chemist in the Grande Rue, where the medicines ordered by Dr. Renaud were all prepared.

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Smith, with a pleasant smile. "I am so much obliged to you for all your kindness; but my darling wants no more medicine, I trust."

"Then, shall I go and stay with him while you are out?" I volunteered, in that foolish, eager zeal which is so tiresome, but yet so pretty an attribute of inexperience and youth.

"Oh, dear, no!" she laughed. "He is as cross as two sticks, and I should be so sorry for you to have to bear his temper. Watkins is used to it."

I had no more to say, and, though her manner was pleasant, I felt rebuffed. Perhaps she saw this, for she added:

"I am going to Fontainebleau on a little bit of business. It is almost a shame to ask you to come with me, but I should like it so much, if you could spare the time; for, to tell you the truth, I feel very strange here."

I learned later that this was a polite fiction; for, apart from the fact that Mrs. Smith was not one ever to feel strange anywhere, she knew more of Fontainebleau than I did; but, if she meant to please me by her request, she fully succeeded. I was ready in a few minutes, and forth we went, going down the shady side of the Rue Royale. When we reached the Grande Rue, Mrs. Smith looked about her, singled out a silk-mercer's shop, and for the first time enlightened me as to the business which had brought her out.

"I saw a very pretty Chantilly *fichu* here the other day," she said, "and I thought it would be the very thing to wear in hot weather. I hope they have got it still."

We entered the shop, and Mrs. Smith explained her errand to the very civil young man who came up to us. She spoke in good French, politely, but with just a touch of cool *hauteur* in her manner. She might be young, beautiful, and alone in the world, but Mrs. Smith evidently knew how to keep people at a distance without either rudeness or effort.

It took some time to find the *fichu*; and, when it came, Mrs. Smith looked at it with evident disappointment.

"What a horror it is!" she said to me in English. "I thought it lovely the other day."

She tossed it contemptuously on one side, and looked at other *fichus*, every one of which she pronounced vastly superior to her first choice. One especially quite fascinated her, and she had all but chosen it, when a smart young lady came out from some inner part of the establishment, and exclaimed, in a tone of righteous horror:

"Monsieur Victor, what are you doing? Why, this is the *fichu* which we are to send home to Madame la Sous-Préfète, as soon as the corner has been altered."

So saying, she took the first-rejected *fichu* and walked away with it. Mrs. Smith's back was turned to the smart young lady, and she could not see, though she could hear, what passed. She continued turning over the little heap of lace on the counter a few minutes, then she said:

"Where is the first I saw?"

She looked for it, while Monsieur Victor ex-

plained that the *fichu* being required by Madame la Sous-Préfète, could not be disposed of to Madame.

"Can you get one like it?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"Oh! certainly; to-morrow—or after to-morrow, at the latest."

"Then let me see it again, if you please."

The *fichu* was again brought up for inspection. Mrs. Smith scarcely gave it a look.

"I shall keep that one," she said, coolly; "and, since Madame la Sous-Préfète's requires to be altered, you may give her the one that comes from Paris."

Monsieur Victor looked blank, but before he could utter a word the smart young lady, who had looked on with the uneasy watchfulness of a hen whose chickens are threatened, uttered a shrill protest of alarm.

"Oh! but that was quite impossible. Madame la Sous-Préfète required that *fichu* particularly, and the corner was to be altered."

"And you need not alter it if I take it," interrupted Mrs. Smith.

"We will get you one like it," suggested Monsieur Victor, "to-morrow."

"I want it to-night."

"Madame la Sous-Préfète must have her *fichu*," persisted the smart young lady.

Mrs. Smith turned round. At the other end of the shop she spied out the master of the establishment, a mild, bald man, in gold spectacles. She went up to him with the *fichu* in her hand, and said, with the most seductive of smiles:

"I am sure, monsieur, you will let me have that *fichu*. I chose it some days back, but my child was so ill that I could not see about it, and now I want it particularly. I really cannot do without it in this heat."

Again the smart young lady protested, and Monsieur Victor interfered. The master looked puzzled, and Mrs. Smith, still smiling and looking lovely, took up her theme without warmth or hurry, but seeming to consider resistance out of the question. And so it proved to be. In vain the name of the sous-préfète was invoked as a spell; what chance has Rinaldo when Armida chooses to set forth her wiles? Before five minutes were over, the sous-préfète had been defeated, and the *fichu* was Mrs. Smith's property.

"It is very pretty," I said, in order to say something, as we walked home together.

"Do you think so?" she replied, carelessly. "I think it hideous."

I must have looked very much puzzled, for she laughed merrily, and her blue eyes beamed

saucy and mischievous from under the shadow of her little hat.

"Why, don't you see that I only took it in order that the sous-préfète might not have it?" she said, quite frankly. Of course I knew as much, but her sincerity put me into a state of great confusion. "You were a quaint and formal little thing in those days," she said to me later, "a great deal too good for me, I fancied, but I learned to know better, Bessie."

This little incident of the *fichu* ended that evening in a most unexpected fashion. Mrs. Smith took her purchase up to her room, and Watkins having imprudently placed it and a pair of scissors in the vicinity of Master Harry's bed, the dainty lace was so clipped and hacked before half an hour was over, that Madame la Sous-Préfète was fully avenged. It was Hermance who told me this. Mrs. Smith said nothing about it; not that she would have cared, in the least, that I should know what had happened, but because it was her habit to be silent on all that concerned herself. Indeed, her reserve and reticence were remarkable in one so young. For, whatever she was, she seemed to be without effort. I now began to see something of her, and, though she was very little older than I was, I soon learned by twenty little things that Mrs. Smith was as much beyond me in decision and will as I was beyond her in intellectual cultivation.

Her education had evidently been of a superficial kind, and her mental gifts neglected. She had no great brilliancy of imagination, no remarkable depth of thought, but she had much quickness of perception, and thorough originality of speech and manner, and an intrepidity which, being united to sensitiveness and all sorts of little fastidious, refined ways, always left her a woman. To crown all, she had a fine, generous, ardent heart, and the most variable of tempers. She was a brave, fickle creature—one of the born charmers who rule this world.

Of course there were spots on the sun; witness the sous-préfète's *fichu*. There was also, in Mrs. Smith, a certain hardness, which came out now and then, and gave me some unpleasant rebuffs; yet, do what I would, I succumbed to her. She might or might not be Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law, the widow of his lost son, my interest in her had nothing to do with the mystery of her story. I cared for her for her own sake, and even though I felt intuitively that she would and must rule me. There was no help for it. She was a woman on whom passion and sorrow had left their stamp, and I was still but half a child, far wiser than she was in book-lore, but

knowing nothing of life, of the world, and, least of all, my own heart.

I do not know how it was that Mrs. Smith at once got hold of James Carr. She certainly did not question me; but, I suppose, I could not keep that back from her. She smiled, and looked a little dreamy as I told her my troubles; then she said, coolly:

"You do not care for him, you know."

Not care for James! I was breathless and indignant, and, of course, I vehemently protested that I did care very much for James.

"Do you?" she said, a little carelessly; and there the matter dropped. But Mrs. Smith's words had left a sting behind them. I did not acquiesce in her verdict—of course not—but I felt uneasy and disturbed, and, to drive some unpleasant thoughts away, I resolved to begin my drawing of the gate forthwith.

The beginnings of most things are pleasant, and so were mine, for I sat in a shady part of the street, quiet and alone, with Hermance knitting by my side. Ere long the sun came out; it was bright and hot, but an umbrella protected me from its scorching rays; there was nothing, however, to protect me against a troop of unruly and most ragged urchins, who buzzed about me like so many flies, irresistibly attracted by my color-box, and by the prodigies of art which I was accomplishing under their very eyes.

"I really cannot work, Hermance," I said, folding my hands in despair, after I had tried expostulation, and she had exhausted menaces, both in vain.

"Will mademoiselle let me have her umbrella?" asked Hermance, in an eager whisper.

"Oh, do take it!" I readily entreated.

Hermance, shutting the umbrella, made a deceitful remark concerning the hour of our *déjeuner*, thereby lulling the enemy to sleep, and was stealthily preparing for action, when Mrs. Smith's voice said behind us:

"What a pretty coloring you have, Miss Carr!—the green above that old gate is so fresh and tender!"

"Do you draw?" I asked, eagerly, for already a vision of going about drawing with the lovely Mrs. Smith had flashed across my mind.

"Oh, no!" she replied, uplifting her eyebrows, as if amazed at the suggestion.

"Would you not like it?" I asked.

She laughed lightly.

"I should not like the trouble," she said.

I had already found out that, save where her pleasure and her feelings were concerned, Mrs.

Smith hated trouble, however fascinating might be the form it took.

"And can you really draw with those very dirty children about you?" she added, surveying the young natives of Fontainebleau with a look of unfeigned disgust, and a most expressive curl of her dainty lips.

"Hermance was going to drive them away with the umbrella when you come up," I said—"do you think she ought to do so?"

"By all means. It will be rare fun to see them scamper away."

We spoke in English, but she made a sign to Hermance, who, taking the hint with French quickness, charged the enemy with such vigor that a shameful rout followed. Mrs. Smith laughed gaily; then, turning back to me, she remarked, in her easy, careless way:

"When you come to see me in Barbison, as I hope you will, Miss Carr, I must devise some means to save you from such a torment; for, of course, you will sketch?"

"But you are not going away yet?" I exclaimed.

"Oh! yes, I am; the carriage is to come round for us in an hour."

I was so amazed that my brush fell from my hand on my drawing, inflicting a great dab of green where green had no business to be. It was that very morning that I had unbosomed myself to Mrs. Smith concerning James Carr; our discourse had been most confidential, and not a word had she said about going away.

This was the first plain intimation I had of a state of things that was to endure between Mrs. Smith and me through many changes of feeling and circumstance—a state of openness on my part, and reticence on hers. I was surprised and sorry—so sorry that I felt an unpleasant tightening at my throat. I dare say Mrs. Smith saw what ailed me, but it was one of her rules to ignore unpleasant facts, and she adhered to it now.

I no longer cared for drawing. We went in together. In the hall we met the cook, who was coming down from Mademoiselle Aubrey's room, and who informed us that luncheon would soon be ready, but that mademoiselle was too poorly to come down.

"I never saw such a cold as hers," said the cook, emphatically, and as if she were looking back over the experience of her fifty years. "*My* opinion is, that Mademoiselle Aubrey is very ill."

I do not know why I cared for the cook's opinion. I had not asked for it, and she gave it with the license of an old servant; for, like Hermance and the gardener, she belonged to the

house, and had been hired with it; but I looked at this brown, stout, elderly face of hers, which had contracted thoughtful wrinkles over fricasees and *entremets*, as if *Æsculapius* himself had spoken. When she went her way it was a cruel stinging, and not a healing serpent that she left behind her.

"Oh! how I wish Dr. Renaud were not gone!" I said to Mrs. Smith; for the good doctor had been gone three days, telegrams from Paris having shortened even his brief holiday. Mrs. Smith looked at the black-and-white flags of the hall on which she stood, and answered not one word. I felt hurt at her indifference, and, leaving her abruptly, I went up to my dear friend's room. I found her sitting in her arm-chair by the window, with her forehead resting on her hand. She looked round as I came in, and showed me a flushed and feverish face and sunken eyes. She looked very ill indeed, but she laughed at me when I spoke of sending for a doctor. She was a good and wise woman, but a thorough skeptic with regard to medical skill in her own case.

"What could a doctor tell me, Mignonne?" she asked. "That I have got a cold! Why, I know it. That I am old! Why, I know that, too. The Spaniards have a proverb about every man who has reached forty being his own doctor, and I think they are a wise people."

"Dear mademoiselle," said I, sitting down by her, and speaking a little impatiently, "why should Spanish ways be our ways? When an inhabitant of Seville wants a house, he says to the architect, 'Here is so much ground; let me have a large garden, cool galleries, and, if there is any room left, apartments!' I suppose that does very well for Seville, but would it do for us?"

Mademoiselle Aubrey patted my cheek.

"You are as quaint as a little fairy," she said, "and you come out with odd bits of wisdom now and then. But let us talk of something else. Can you tell me when Mrs. Smith is going?"

"Then you do know she is going?" I exclaimed, opening my eyes.

"Yes, my dear, she came and told me. I am sorry I cannot go down and bid her good-by."

Then she let her go; she did not press her to stay, and yet she surely knew that Mr. de Lusignan would like to find her here. Such were my thoughts, and Mademoiselle Aubrey, giving me a clear, firm look, said, as if to answer them:

"Honor is shown in many ways, Mignonne. I know Mr. de Lusignan is on his way home, and, knowing this, it would have been treachery to press Mrs. Smith to stay another hour. She came

to us in dire extremity. She must be free to depart the moment she chooses to do so."

"Dear mademoiselle," I exclaimed, a little mortified, "I should not like to entrap Mrs. Smith, or any one."

Mademoiselle Aubrey smiled provokingly in my face.

"Mignonne, you could not, even if you wished it," she said. "Nature gave you a tell-tale pair of honest, brown eyes—and very beautiful eyes they are, too—tender and true!—with which I defy you to entrap a baby. And now leave me, and go to your luncheon, for my head aches, and I want rest."

I obeyed; but, as I looked back at her from the door, I was struck with her look of illness. I remembered seeing such a look many a time on Uncle John's pale face, and a sudden terror seized me. What if she, too, were going to die?

"Miss Carr, how scared you look!" said Mrs. Smith, as we met on the stairs.

"Oh! Mademoiselle Aubrey is so ill!" I exclaimed in sore distress. Mrs. Smith looked at me steadily; then, gently laying her hand on my shoulder, she said, suddenly:

"Would you like me to stay with you?"

"Oh, yes!" I cried, eagerly, "I should like it so much! But—but—"

Here I came to a full stop.

"But what?" she asked, quietly.

"Mr. de Lusignan is coming back," I stammered; then, feeling how ungracious the remark must seem, I improved it by adding, "It is only fair to tell you so. I mean—that is to say—well, I mean that, perhaps, you do not like him."

Mrs. Smith smiled.

"My dear Miss Carr, what a very strange idea! However, my mind is quite made up. I will not leave you, especially to go back to Barbison, while Mademoiselle Aubrey is so unwell."

And so the carriage, which was actually at the door, was sent away empty, and Mrs. Smith was with us still when my guardian arrived on the night of the following day.

CHAPTER XI.

MADemoiselle AUBREY was much better. I was glad of it, though a little vexed to hear her boast that her Spanish proverb was a true one. Joy, however, being more potent to send me to sleep than vexation to keep me awake, I slept so soundly that my guardian's arrival took place without my knowledge. When I awoke, how-

ever, and opened my window, the scent of a fragrant cigar stealing up from below gave me a warning which a peep from behind my muslin curtains confirmed. There was my guardian *in propria persona*, and gazing at the stone vases in front of the dining-room windows with a look of calm content.

I was generally shy of intruding on Mr. de Lusignan. He was so ready for sarcasm and laughter, so quick at detecting ridicule, that I was half afraid of him; but eager curiosity proved too strong for fear this morning. I dressed hastily, and was down-stairs before Mr. de Lusignan's cigar was out.

His greeting was pleasant and friendly.

"Good-morning, Bessie," he said, kindly, holding out his hand. "Why, you are as fresh as a rose—no need of asking how you are. Mademoiselle Aubrey is well, of course?"

"She is better," I said, gravely.

"Better! Nothing serious ailed her, I hope?"

"Indeed, she was very poorly—so poorly that Mrs. Smith would not leave me alone."

No surer arrow than this was ever shot. Mr. de Lusignan turned round full upon me.

"What Mrs. Smith?" he asked.

"The lady whom we saw in Barbison," I replied, with much composure.

"And that lady is here in this house?"

"Yes; she came the day you left us. Her little boy was dying with the croup, and she brought him to Dr. Renaud, who saved him. He is quite well again," I considerably added.

Still Mr. de Lusignan looked as if he could not believe his ears.

"And is the child—her child—is that child here?" he asked.

"Yes, with the nurse, Watkins."

Mr. de Lusignan drew a deep breath.

"Well, Bessie, your bag of news seems full," he said, after a while, "but you open it with a niggardly hand. Do not be so sparing, child."

He spoke impatiently. Ungrateful man! he little knew how I had hurried down to him, on account of that same bagful of news, and how only a proper sense of dignity made me deal out my tidings with well-assumed indifference. I now took pity on him, however, and told him all I knew. We had left the front of the house, and were walking along a cool alley still sparkling with morning dews. Birds carolled very sweetly above us, every thing was fresh, living, and delightful, but Mr. de Lusignan took heed of nothing; he was absorbed in my tale. Never before had I had such a listener.

"Well," he said, drawing a deep breath,

when I had done, "it is her own doing. She is fast in my power now. I could not imagine how I should manage, but it is her own doing."

The words recalled me to myself. I felt a secret compunction at having caused them. There was war between my guardian and Mrs. Smith. I had forgotten it; but now, hearing him boast of how he held her in his toils, my heart smote me for my forgetfulness. Unconscious that I sided with the enemy, he said, eagerly:

"Mrs. Smith must have written letters since she came here. Have you seen her writing?—is it at all like this?"

He drew a soiled card out of his pocket-book and showed it to me. I guessed that this was the card which Mademoiselle Aubrey had mentioned to me, but to my great relief I could answer with perfect truth:

"I have not seen Mrs. Smith's writing; I do not know it."

His countenance fell a little.

"*Tant pis*," he said, shortly; "but look at this well, Mignonne, bear this hand in mind, and, if Mrs. Smith's should be like it, tell me so."

I did not answer. I had not the least intention of complying with my guardian's request, and felt affronted at the task laid upon me. Impartiality is not the gift of youth. It was not mine. I was a partisan, and a passionate one too. I had deserted my guardian's standard for Mrs. Smith's flag, and I felt ready to die in defence of my new colors. I never so much as dreamed of holding an even balance between these two, of giving something to one and something to the other. I was for Mrs. Smith out and out, and, so far as I could do so without treason to the confidence that had been reposed in me, I resolved to help her against her enemy. My guardian, who understood me as little as most men of his years understand girls of eighteen, having got all he wanted out of me, no longer cared for my society, and showed me so by his silence.

"I think I shall go in now," I said; "I want to go to the house, and I am only interfering with your cigar."

With this arrow, which he received with an amused smile at my petulance, I left him, but I did not go straight back to the house. The morning was lovely; there was a pleasant shivering in the foliage above me, and gay trilling of birds hidden in the leaves, a low hum of bees busy with some tangled honeysuckle, which all delayed my steps and made me linger. So I walked on slowly, building my little romance the

while. I was a great day-dreamer in those days. The world was not wide or full enough for me. I must needs add to its multitudes, and extend even its broad horizon. So I was always enacting dramas of my own, by the side of those dramas which life told me then, as it tells them to us all. I had a wonderful subject just now—the first interview of Mr. de Lusignan and his rebellious daughter-in-law. I could not believe that it would pass quietly. He was too impetuous to be patient, and, self-possessed though she was, could Mrs. Smith be impenetrable?

Suppose that he taxed her with her identity, and, proving it, claim the child! What would she do? Deny his right, and, maybe, go off scornful and defiant! What then would be his remedy? That she would be untractable I felt sure. I could not forget how she had borne herself to Dr. Renaud, imperious and beautiful, a very queen in look and language. My heart beat, and my imagination felt on fire as I thought of these things. But there was more than the love of a dramatic episode in my feelings for Mrs. Smith, and I began to think, since I was for her, I ought to warn her. She might not know of Mr. de Lusignan's return, and I could not bear to think that she should be taken by surprise. Why should I not go and tell her at once, in a careless way, of course (with that gift of dissembling which was so strong in me), that Mr. de Lusignan had come back. My shortest way to the house was across a green, sunlit grass-plot. I ran over it, heedless of the sun; but, just as I reached a group of gay laburnums with hanging yellow hair, and was going to step through them on the path, I heard my guardian's voice. Forgetting that he could not read my intention in my face, I stepped back and hid behind a tall thorn, hoping that Mademoiselle Aubrey, whom he was no doubt addressing, would not detect me.

But it was not Mademoiselle Aubrey who now appeared by his side in the cool, shady avenue. Walking by my guardian, taller than he was by half a head, I saw the beautiful Mrs. Smith, laughing and talking, and seeming in the brightest good-humor. That interview, which my imagination had painted in such tragic hues, was a tame affair after all, and my drama had melted into a light comedy. I cannot say which I felt most, amazed or disappointed. Mrs. Smith looked in a charming temper, and Mr. de Lusignan was as gallant and attentive as a lover in the first stage of his passion. Tall rose-bushes, on which crimson and snowy blossoms began to appear, grew by the path. He paused, in order to strip their thorny boughs, and to heap Mrs.

Smith with the spoil; she took the flowers with careless grace, and seemed quite at her ease in receiving his homage.

"Since it is the only flowers you care for, have them all," he said. "I wish I could transplant the trees, and make them give you their fresh roses every morning just underneath your window; but they would only die."

"And what a pity that would be!" she answered, with a little, light, mocking laugh. "Well, I do like roses—but, my goodness! you have not left one, and Miss Carr likes roses too."

They passed on. I had heard, and could scarcely believe my ears. Yes, I liked roses, and had told her so; but Mrs. Smith had not given me the information with which she had just favored my guardian. She had not said to me, "Well, I do like roses," in that voice; and, what was more, she had never shown that relish of my admiration, and that candid wish to subdue me, which I had just read in her blue eyes. I was very angry—so angry that I called her "a dreadful flirt," and, figuratively, of course, washed my hands of her concerns. Later, I learned to put a fairer and a truer construction upon Mrs. Smith's conduct, not merely in this instance, but in many another.

There was nothing of a flirt in her whole being, for, spite her beauty, which would have made it so easy, I could never detect in her the faintest wish to win a heart she did not really care for. Admiration she liked without disguise, just as she got it without effort; but her heart was true, and her mind was pure; only she could not help feeling, no more than she could help enjoying it, that every man who came near her was with regard to her as a moth is to the flame of a candle. Many women have the power of charming, but not with the same charm, nor over the same individuals. Some win the hearts of little children; others are dear to cats and dogs; others prevail over their own sex; and I have heard of one lady who, by a subtle fascination which no one could fathom, got her female friends to vie in the mending of her stockings. Many women, on the other hand, are popular with men only. Beautiful women can be hated by men, or Mary Stuart or Marie Antoinette would never have died on a scaffold; but I never knew a man who did not like Mrs. Smith. She was perfectly aware of her power, but she also knew that it did not extend to women, and the knowledge helped to make her cool to her own sex. She knew well enough that I was an exception to this general rule, for she once said to me later, "Bessie, you are the only girl who ever

cared for me, I do believe." But still I belonged to the sex from whose favor she had nothing to expect, and whom, quite naturally, without intent or design, she never tried to please.

Why was it so, I wonder? Why was this beautiful, warm-hearted, original creature in some sort excluded from the liking and regard even of my good and indulgent friend, Mademoiselle Aubrey? She neither could nor would say any thing against her, but still she did not like her much; and yet, if there was one woman for whom Mrs. Smith ever had a foible, it was for this civil stranger, who kept her aloof by the most scrupulous courtesy. I had seen that from the first days of her stay with us—I saw it more plainly still after my guardian's return.

I now went straight back to the house in high dudgeon, leaving Mr. de Lusignan and Mrs. Smith to their flirtation, as I chose to call it. As I passed the dining-room windows, I saw Mademoiselle Aubrey sitting in one, reading the paper. She took off her spectacles, and smiled at me with her bright, genial face.

"How early you are out, Mignonne!" she said, bending out toward me. "Have you seen Mr. de Lusignan yet?"

I carelessly replied that I had just seen him in the grounds with Mrs. Smith.

"Already!" she exclaimed; then she added, with a smile: "I need not ask how they are getting on. Mr. de Lusignan is making himself agreeable to the pretty woman, and the pretty woman likes it."

This was so true a picture of what I had just seen, that I stared, amazed, at my friend, who, without minding it, leaned back in her chair and sighed.

"I wish it were all over," she said.

This brought me back from my righteous wrath against Mrs. Smith to my interest in that secret which she guarded so closely.

"But what can be her motive for not acknowledging herself Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law?" I asked, in a low tone.

"There may be so many reasons, Mignonne. She is a Protestant; the child's grandfather is a Catholic."

I shook my head. I had noticed no such fervor of religious belief in Mrs. Smith as to justify this conjecture.

"I do not say it is that," resumed Mademoiselle Aubrey; "but one thing is clear, she will never confess until he compels her, and I wish he would or could, and that it were all over."

Two laughing voices now told us that the pair were coming. I ran up to my room to

avoid them; but I could not thus shun Mrs. Smith. Presently I heard her step on the stairs. A quick, smart tap at my door followed, and, though still very cross with her, I said, "Come in." She entered, fresh and lovely as the bunch of roses she held. Involuntarily I let some of my anger go when I saw her beautiful face in the door-way. She shut the door with a quick, hurried motion, and came up to me, looking full of fun.

"Oh, you think I did not see you when Mr. de Lusignan was gathering these," she said, shaking the roses at me, and sprinkling me with their dew. "What did you mean by hiding, Miss Carr? There, I have brought you the roses—I have not kept one. Where shall I put them?"

"But I do not want to take them from you," I said, rather stiffly.

"Oh! never mind that," she answered, with a cool disregard of objection on my part. "This old blue china beaker will just do."

She poured some water from my water-jug into the vase, and began settling the roses in it with a deft light hand. I was not much pleased, and maybe my tone showed it when I said—

"I really do not wish to rob you of your flowers, Mrs. Smith."

"You mean that you will not have them?" she retorted, pausing in her task, and turning a little pale.

I was silent.

She took the roses out of the water, and deliberately went up to my open window, with so evident an intention of flinging them out into the court below, whence rose the voices of my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey, that I ran up to her, and, holding back her arm, cried, in sudden dismay:

"Oh, pray do not."

"I will not have them, you know," she said, looking round over her shoulder at me. She was smiling, and looked lovely, but her face was still pale and angry.

"Oh! of course, I must take them," I answered, resignedly; "but it is too bad. Do take these crimson ones."

She looked full at me. There was a deadly beauty in her face.

"Have one of those roses in the same room with my child and me!" she said, her lip quivering as she spoke—"not for an hour; not for a moment!" she added, her voice sinking with every word she uttered, till, with the last, it was a mere whisper.

I understood her now. It was Mr. de Lusignan.

gnan's gift which she so hated. Who would have thought it that had seen and heard her an hour later, chatting gayly with my guardian across the breakfast-table? And, what is more, I do believe she liked his pretty speeches and evident admiration of her beauty. These were something distinct from himself, I dare say—an involuntary homage, not a free gift, like the roses that now filled my room with their fragrance.

CHAPTER XII.

IN common politeness, I suppose, Mrs. Smith could not leave the house immediately on the return of its master, but it was understood and agreed that she was to go back to Barbison at the end of the week. In the mean while, she was so pleasant and so much at her ease with Mr. de Lusignan, that the little incident of the roses, which were gently fading away in my room, seemed to me like a dream. But she could be so, and yet be true to her own heart. Her feelings were keen, and lay deep, though they were not of the most lasting kind, but her temper was not subject to them. She could have been pleasant with the executioner on the scaffold-steps, and I am sure that she would have wished to charm him, and make him lament his duty; so, though she could have flung away the roses given by Mr. de Lusignan's hand, she could be on excellent terms with him, take his admiration as her due, and laugh and talk with him by the hour, if need be. And yet, knowing what I knew, it was not hard for me to see how deep a gulf yawned between these two. They might walk on either side, and exchange pleasant speech as they went along; but the chasm was there. Every thing seemed to divide them. We had not seen much of little Harry while he was ill; but we saw next to nothing of him now. His mother always managed so that his walks or drives should take place either when we were out of the way, or when we expected them least. Mr. de Lusignan tried to defeat her, but she was too vigilant; and, after a few ineffectual attempts, he quietly gave it up. Indeed, there was a tinge of affectation in his indifference to the child when he came across him. It was odd to see a meeting between these two. They were much alike. They had the same cast of features; the same dark complexion; the same brown eyes; and they looked at each other much in the same way—Mr. de Lusignan not saying a word, the child silent as a little mouse, and solemn as a judge;

each seeming on his guard with the other. My guardian, however, was not a good dissembler. His carelessness toward the boy did not agree with the keenness he displayed in other matters. He was always charming company with Mrs. Smith; but she could not utter a word that he did not listen to with silent attention. She could not drop a hint in which the past was concerned, howsoever remotely, that Mr. de Lusignan was not all ears and eager watchfulness. Yet, so far as I could see, she never said any thing from which he could draw the least conclusion. The past she alluded to had not the most distant connection with the present. As to Watkins, she was so stupid, and such a slave to her mistress, that she was useless, or worse than useless, in all matters concerning information. I am not sure that Mr. de Lusignan ever condescended to make any attempt upon her; but I am sure that any such would have been a failure. And so the days passed, and we reached Friday, and Mrs. Smith was to leave us on the Saturday morning.

It was a lovely day, and we were to go and visit the rocks of Boulogny, but when the time came, Mrs. Smith's head ached, and she could not accompany us. I was in her room when she told me so—for I often went to her room now in the morning, and we had many a pleasant chat, in which Mrs. Smith always contrived to talk agreeably and amusingly, but to tell me nothing that I could repeat—I mean to the detriment of her secret—for a secret she certainly had—even I, slender though was my share of penetration, saw as much. She might have said what she pleased, so far as I was concerned—her secrets were safe with me; but she was on her guard, and I was no more trusted than any one else in the house.

"I am so sorry your head aches," I said, with chagrin. "I shall not enjoy the rocks of Boulogny without you."

Mrs. Smith was leaning back in a deep arm-chair, with closed eyes; for, though she could be full of life and energy when she chose, she had a habit of being always languid and tired when she was not interested. She half-opened her beautiful eyes as I spoke, and, with a winning smile, she said:

"That is prettily said of you, Bessie—I beg your pardon, but I do so like the name 'Bessie;' and the best is, that you always say these pretty things as if you meant them. Well, I am sorry my head aches. I think it must be writing to that tiresome Paris dress-maker, Madame André, who will not send me home my things. But I

have just informed her that if I do not get them by next week, she may keep them."

"And I have been writing to James," I said, with a sigh. "Would you believe it, Mrs. Smith, he scolded me because I was ten days without writing to him."

Mrs. Smith laughed.

"Ten days! Why, if you cared for him, you would write to him every day, and twice a day even."

"Oh! but what should I write about?" I cried, alarmed at the prospect of such extensive correspondence. "And as to that, he does not write twice a day to me, does he?"

She smiled—a provoking smile, which she had when she pleased.

"What a pair of lovers!" she said, with gentle mockery. "And are you taking your letters to Boulogne?" she added, glancing at the letter which I held in my hand. "Is there a post-office there, hidden in the rocks, which Miss Carr delights in?"

"No; but there is a post-office in Fontainebleau, to which I am going now."

"Are you? Then would it trouble you too much to take charge of my letter too? Watkins stupidly left it behind when she took out Harry a while ago."

She took the letter from the table where it was lying, as if to hand it to me, but I turned my head away.

"Please do not ask me," I said, in a low tone—"please do not."

"Please do not!" she echoed, with gentle irony. "Why, my dear Miss Carr, the whole world is welcome to turn that letter inside out. Here it is," she added, holding it up, and reading the direction aloud. "Madame André, Rue d'Amsterdam, 22; and if either you or any one else in this house should care to open it, and see what French I write, why, either you or that 'any one' is welcome."

"No one in this house would do such a thing," I answered, gravely. "But, please, I would rather not post your letter."

I said no more; but I suppose I had said enough, for Mrs. Smith carelessly put the letter back again on the table. I turned away so as not to see the writing, and soon after this I left her.

As I walked down the Rue Royale I wondered whether I had not said too much—whether, in my wish to be true to Mrs. Smith, I had not in some sort been false to the trust reposed in me. I had certainly warned her; now I had no right to warn her, for I had no right to remember what

had been said to me, so far as to give her the least hint about it. These conscientious scruples were still troubling me when I came back; and very useless was my trouble—as the event soon proved.

We were not to go to Boulogne for another hour, and when I passed through the gates which had once opened for the beautiful and ambitious Gabrielle, Mademoiselle Aubrey sat working in the dining-room, and Mr. de Lusignan was reading the morning paper. I had scarcely joined them, feeling a most guilty traitor, when Watkins came in too, with the child in her arms; and almost at the same moment, as if she had been watching in order to intercept them on their return, Mrs. Smith came down with her letter in her hand. The dining-room door was open, and we all saw her stepping down the stairs in her long black dress—fair, graceful, and stately, like a young Diana, when the goddess was still in her prime, if it so be that there was for these immortals a rise and wane like that of human loveliness. She held the letter in her hand, as I said, and it seemed to me as if she held it thus openly, spite the warning I had given her, from that spirit of defiance which has led so many women to perdition. I saw Mademoiselle Aubrey and my guardian exchange a swift, involuntary look. He rose and said, politely:

"I hope your headache is better, Mrs. Smith?"

"Not much," she replied, looking fresh and lovely as a rose. "I shall not—"

Here Watkins stumbled on the gravel, and fell with the child, who uttered a piercing cry. In a moment his mother flew out to him. She turned to Watkins, who was picking herself up slowly, and her beautiful face was blazing with sudden anger as she cried:

"How dare you let him fall!—how dare you!"

Poor Watkins remained dumb, while Mrs. Smith, snatching the child from her, first ascertained that he had not a scratch, then smothered him with kisses.

"The fates themselves are for me," triumphantly said Mr. de Lusignan, picking up the letter, which had fallen almost at his feet. He opened his pocket-book, compared the card treasured there with the letter dropped by Mrs. Smith, then looked at Mademoiselle Aubrey; and I read in that look, bright, and exulting, and significant, that Mrs. Smith's secret was gone out of her own keeping. She came back with the child in her arms, softly comforting him.

"You have dropped your letter, Mrs. Smith," said my guardian, going out to meet her in the hall. He handed it back to her, as I thought,

but instead of the letter it was the card which he purposely put in her hand. She looked at it, then let it fall contemptuously on the black-and-white flags.

"I beg your pardon," he said, seeming to discover his mistake and picking up his card; he this time gave her the letter.

They exchanged looks. I thought that surely now the storm would burst; but no, my guardian added not another word, and she took her letter back without comment.

"Watkins, will you post that, if you please?" she said, handing the letter to the maid.

She was going up to her room with the child still in her arms, and, without giving one of us a look, when my guardian said:

"Is your headache still so bad that we cannot have the pleasure of your company at Boulogne to-day, Mrs. Smith?"

She turned round on the stairs and confronted him. Again they exchanged looks; and in those looks I read a quiet defiance that half-frightened me. "Leave the house while I am out of it if you dare!" I fancied that his look said; and in hers I imagined that I read the answer:

"Defy me if *you* dare!"

"I cannot have that pleasure, thank you," she said, civilly, and she went on.

People talk of the power of circumstances over human lives; they speak of destinies that are moulded by little accidents and strange coincidences. These are but empty words to me. To me life has ever been more or less the fulfilment of those words of Jean Paul: "Character is destiny." The destiny which ruled my life was called Mrs. Smith. On those subtle changes in her variable temper which I note down here, hung the joys and sorrows of my life. If, as I most assuredly should have done in her case, she had gone out to post her letter with Watkins and the child, and never come back, the whole course of my life would have been other from what it has been and is still. But she was brave to imprudence. She scorned to fly till defeat was inevitable—flight was useless.

I wondered why my guardian did not urge his point; I wondered why he did not tax her plainly with being his son's widow; but he, too, liked this contest—he, too, was defiant and felt strong, for he had an arrow in his quiver of which Mrs. Smith knew naught, or she would scarcely have been so reckless and so bold.

He now said, rather ironically:

"Since Mrs. Smith's headache is so bad that she cannot leave her room, we must go to Boulogne without her."

Mademoiselle Aubrey was stout, and by taste and habit no pedestrian. So we had a carriage to go to Boulogne. But before we were half-way, my variable guardian changed his mind.

"Let us go to the Sanguinède," he said, and to the Sanguinède we went. This is a pretty little fountain up in the rocks, and in the very heart of the forest. The water trickles gently from under a little dark arch, and shines in a dark stone tunnel with a faint glimmer. Ferns and tangled weeds grow in the rocks above and around it. The spot is much visited by tourists, and mossy banks, and wooden seats and tables, have been provided for picnic-parties. A man and his wife are the keepers of the spot; they provide visitors with refreshments, and keep a stall garnished with carved *souvenirs* of the place—pen holders, inkstands, reels, bracelets, needle-cases, rulers, and paper-knives, being the chief staple of their little stock.

"Do not look at them, Mignonne," said Mr. de Lusignan, seeing me attracted to these wares. "They are horrid trash, and all impositions as well—made in Paris or Switzerland nine-tenths of them."

I was not convinced, and internally resolved to purchase a pen-holder for James; but obediently turned away. A young girl of sixteen or so, with lively black eyes, the keeper's daughter, was standing by, ready to show us the fountain, which we had not yet seen.

"Will you taste the waters of the fountain?" she said, in a glib, high, *cicerone* voice. "The emperor drinks of them every year. They are ferruginous waters—very cool and pleasant."

This little ceremony being complied with, we were left to wander about at our will. Fontainebleau was very empty that year, and the Sanguinède was quite lonely on this afternoon. A lovely solitude of grand rocks, whence the eye got many a green glimpse of forest sloping down below. Mists of heat hung above that undulating plain of soft verdure; the air was still; the sky had not a cloud; lizards basked in the sun, and there was a faint chirruping of birds. It was all very beautiful, but too calm for my volatile guardian.

"I suppose you have got enough of it," he soon said; but his sister-in-law, who knew that I had brought my sketch-book, remarked kindly:

"I believe you wish to visit the grottoes of Saint-Germain—suppose you leave us here to rest the while?"

The suggestion was after Mr. de Lusignan's own heart, for it gave him motion without our company. So he adopted it at once, and taking

the keeper of the Sanguinède for his guide, he left us by the little fountain, sitting in the shade, Mademoiselle Aubrey reading, and I drawing hard and fast, and feeling the happiest of mortals. A grand composition had already flashed across my mind. That fountain should be the background of a picture in which Mrs. Smith was to be the prominent figure. What she should be doing there I did not ask myself, not having time; but I supposed I should find it out; and in the mean while I worked at my background with all the ardor of a young artist in the first season of art.

Oh! surely there is magic in the sweetness of that early bondage, to which we all more or less succumb; for who are they so matter-of-fact or so cold as not to have kissed once on a time the lips of the Fairy Queen, like Thomas the Rhymer, and, like him, become her slave? That kiss seals our fate. What she bids, we must henceforth do; when she calls, we must go. Her name is Fancy, whatever guise she may take. She wields palette and brush with the young painter, and shows him picture after picture of his covering the walls of palaces. She whispers in the composer's ear, and his music streams forth through oratorios and operas in glorious abundance; and he is famous forever. She sits behind the clerk's desk in the counting-house, and he sees his ships making their way across the ocean freighted with wealth untold. To all, whatever their venture may be, she is lavish of promises and fond illusions; she comes from fairy-land with her hands full of them, and scatters them without stint or measure as she goes along. To me, as I sat there, her Fairy Majesty was content to show forth a water-color drawing, in which there should be a romantic little fountain; and on that background of sombre rock and tender green, a beautiful woman, smiling out at the beholder in all her witchery. The Fairy Queen, however, did not visit Mademoiselle Aubrey, but in her stead she had the sun, who peeped in upon her most intrusively. She shifted her place again and again, then lost patience.

"I suppose I can leave you here, Mignonne," she said, "and go and take a little walk down the valley of the Solle?"

"Indeed you can, mademoiselle," I replied, eagerly. "You see how quiet a place this is."

It was, indeed, very still. I fancied that the woman and the young girl whom I had seen must both have gone to sleep, so silent was every thing around me, but as soon as my companion was gone I found out my mistake. A shrill voice

proceeding from the spot where the stall stood suddenly exclaimed:

"Well, and what have you brought?"

To which question a rough voice answered—

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" cried the shrill voice—"no bottles?"

"No."

"Bottles!" I thought; "wine, cider, or beer, *à la bonne heure*. But what can these people want with bottles? Do they sell the insipid waters of that little trickling thing?" I was surprised at this, but the next question bewildered me still more.

"No bottles," repeated the shrill voice, angrily; "and windmills—did you bring any windmills?"

From the tone in which this question was put, it was plain that, if the rough-voiced speaker had not brought any windmills, matters were very bad indeed at the Sanguinède. And he had not.

"No," he answered, doggedly, "I have not brought any windmills."

He did not complain that these windmills were heavy and cumbersome, but he seemed to stand upon his right to bring them or not, according to his pleasure. I could bear this no longer. I must know what sort of giant this was who was expected to bring windmills to the Sanguinède; but I had no need to make the attempt. The shrill voice soon enlightened me, by asking indignantly:

"And what am I to say to the lady who ordered a dozen of bottles and seven windmills last month, because I told her they were the best needle-cases and mètre-measures to be found in all Fontainebleau?"

So here was a fall; these bottles and windmills were only needle-cases and yard-measures—only wooden toys fashioned thus to lure a few francs out of the pockets of idle ladies. Still it was a pretty fancy, and I did wish I could get a windmill for my dear Mrs. Smith. She was not very industrious, to be sure, but she was inordinately fond of knick-knacks of all sorts, as I already knew, and I was sure that a windmill would take her fancy. A pause of silence, which I found pleasant, followed the bit of dialogue I had heard. Then, suddenly, the girl's voice exclaimed gayly:

"You come too late, monsieur, the place is taken."

"Is it? Then I shall stay here with you, Madeline."

The voice which answered thus was a pleas-

ant voice; a man's voice, full and young, which, it seemed to me, I had heard before.

"But you cannot draw here," said Madeleine.

"Oh! yes, I can. I have those ferns and yonder old tree—besides, I am tired of the fountain. How do you get on, Madeleine?"

"Oh! so well! As soon as any one comes, I run out and say, 'Will you taste the waters of the fountain? The emperor drinks of them every year; they are ferruginous waters, very cool and pleasant.' And I like it," she added, bursting out into a free, merry peal of girlish laughter, which made me feel sure that the shrill-voiced woman was not close by.

The young man laughed too; then, I suppose, he set to his drawing, for there was another pause of silence, during which I began to wonder why Mademoiselle Aubrey stayed so long away.

"What! all alone, Mignonne!" said Mr. de Lusignan, now coming up one of the paths behind me with his guide.

I told him how and why Mademoiselle Aubrey had left me, and that I feared she had gone astray.

"Very likely," coolly said the guide, "strangers will go about alone, and they will think they know the right path, and, of course, they take the wrong turnings and get lost."

I was much frightened, but Mr. de Lusignan laughed at my fears.

"Stay here, Mignonne," he said; "we shall go down the valley, and soon find and bring her back, depend upon it."

"But I would rather not stay here," I said, tying up my things in a great hurry.

"Then go and sit in the carriage," he said, coolly; and, having thus decreed that I was not to accompany him, he left me.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERY disconsolately I walked away from the fountain to the shady place where the carriage was standing. Madeleine was invisible, the stall was deserted, and, I suppose, the young painter had got tired of the ferns and the old tree, for he too had vanished. I had to cross one of those open places planted with trees, which are called *dormoirs*—perhaps because, in by-gone times, they were used by cattle for their rest during the heat of the day or the freshness of the night. It was cool and green, and had the solemn look which is so striking in all these places of deep

leafy shade when you enter them from the hot glare of day without. Involuntarily I stood still, feeling the beauty of the place, as Nature, when she bade these trees grow in stately grace, and spread their green arms between earth and sky, surely meant that I, that any gazer, should feel it, in the very depths of my heart.

As I stood thus, forgetting myself for a moment, I heard voices on the road, from which a hedge of tangled brushwood divided me. I started with something more than surprise, for surely this was the voice of Mrs. Smith. I knew those gay tones, so light, so frank, so free.

"Well," she was saying, "what if I should never go back to Barbison? I am free to lose a season's rent, I suppose."

"If you would only let me be where you are," pleaded the other voice, tenderly, but remonstratively; and I knew that voice too, though it now spoke English with a warm accent, which was like an echo of James Carr's—it was that of the young painter, whose place by the fountain I had usurped, and who had been talking to Madeleine.

"Oh! but that would never do," she answered, in a clear, decisive tone. "Have you where I am!—no, no, thank you. We may meet now and then, but there must be no following of me, *if you please*."

There was a pause, of submission, no doubt, which made me recollect that I had no business to stand there listening to Mrs. Smith's discourse with this unknown friend of hers; so I walked on, and, as the speakers were walking on too, but in an opposite direction, I only heard this remark from Mrs. Smith, which gave me unexpected light on another subject:

"You must not suppose that I came here for you to see how I fit with the fountain, Mr. George. I want some windmills."

"Windmills!" he echoed, in slight surprise, and I heard no more.

The driver was asleep, and the carriage was a most uncomfortable place to wait in, but I did not feel tempted to go back to the fountain. I would have done and borne any thing to shun a meeting with Mrs. Smith. I thought no harm of her, and would have vowed that she was innocent in the face of much stronger evidence than I now had against her; but how could I help wondering at a headache which came and went so suddenly? How could I help knowing that she had come to the Sanguinède because she thought we were in Boulogny? It was plain enough that to meet us was the last of her wishes, and that, whether with or without rea-

son, she did not choose that this Mr. George should claim her acquaintance in our presence.

I thought no harm of her, but I felt unhappy. My little span of life had been spent in that open daylight which is the charm of youth; and even James Carr had not cast the shadow of a mystery upon it. I could not get accustomed to the secrecy in which it pleased Mrs. Smith to envelop the least of her actions. She was going away from us to-morrow—what need was there to deceive us to-day? The thought had scarcely risen within me, when love, ever watchful and tender, called out, "Treason!" Mrs. Smith was secretive, but she was as truthful as any one who has a secret to guard well may be. Why should not her head have ached when she said so? and why should not that headache have left her after we were gone? Very true, but then there was that appointment at the Sanguinède. What if there were? pleaded Love again. Was she not free to meet a dozen of Mr. Georges, if such were her pleasure? In short, long before the time when I heard my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had not lost her way after all, coming back, Mrs. Smith had prevailed once more, and was victorious on all the line. I could not help it, and surely it was well for me that I could not. Is not that perfect faith in the objects of its love, the faith more of worship than of love, one of the best and dearest attributes of early life? Woe be to the young to whom doubt is easy, and trust a lesson hard to learn!

"How is Mrs. Smith's headache?" were my guardian's first words when we came back.

They were spoken to Hermance, who opened her round, black eyes.

"Madame Smith looked very well when she went out with Watkins," she replied; "and the little monsieur looked very well too."

Mademoiselle Aubrey glanced at her brother-in-law, who, scorning to look uneasy, I suppose, smiled, as he said in English:

"Mrs. Smith will come back."

The words were scarcely uttered, when Mrs. Smith, Watkins, and the child, all came in at the gate. No carriage brought them. They looked as if they had just been in the forest for five minutes, and came back again to the house. Mrs. Smith was fresh and lovely, and quite gay and pleasant. Her headache was gone, she said, and she felt herself once more.

"Well, and how did you like Boulogne?" she asked.

She spoke so evidently to me that I was bound to answer. I looked dreadfully confused, I dare say, as I stammered:

"We—we did not go to Boulogne."

Our eyes met. She read the truth in mine; but, turning quietly from me, she said, addressing my guardian:

"And where, then, did you go?"

"To the Sanguinède. Of course you know it?"

"Yes," she carelessly answered, "I have been there."

She was satisfied that I had not betrayed her, I suppose; for, as she passed me in the hall, she gently laid her hand on my shoulder, and, kissing my cheek, she said, kindly:

"You are a dear little thing; but I should not have cared a pin, you know."

And I am sure that she would not. She might choose to keep her own counsel, but she was far too honest and too brave to care for discovery. The words, such as they were, did me a world of good. I was sure now, sure as I lived, that my idol was without a blemish; and, not having the sad experience which reconciles older travellers to the golden idols with feet of clay that abound in life, I was, as I said, made happy. But my guardian had seen Mrs. Smith whispering to me, and that suspicion which never slept in him was roused.

"What was Mrs. Smith saying to you, Mignonne?" he asked.

Luckily I could answer him.

"Mrs. Smith told me that I was a dear little thing," I replied, gayly.

"Most true, Mignonne; but what about?"

Was there ever a woman who did not know how to parry a question?

"Can I not be a dear little thing without its being about something?" I asked, in so injured a tone that my guardian laughed, and the mistrustful dragon in his bosom took another nap.

All this was not to endure long. A few hours more, and the inevitable crisis came.

Dinner was late that evening. When I went down I found my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey coming in from the garden, where they had been taking a walk, which, in my thoughts, I could not help calling a private conversation; and, just as I joined them on the terrace in front of the dining-room, Mrs. Smith appeared, with little Harry in her arms.

"Let us all sit here a while," said Mr. de Lusignan, setting out chairs for us in front of the house. "Dinner is all but ready, and it is really cooler here than in the garden."

"Besides, one can make fun of the people in the street as they pass," laughed Mrs. Smith, with a shrewd guess at my sarcastic guardian's real motives. He did not deny the implied impeach-

uent. He was very merry this morning—unusually so, considering that it was before dinner; as garrulous, indeed, as Mademoiselle Aubrey was grave and silent. A soft, yellow light filled the warm sky, where sunset fires had left many a rosy flush, and still tinged many a dainty little cloud. I sat admiring Mrs. Smith's perfect profile as she leaned back in her chair, with little Harry clasped and half-asleep in her arms. In that golden evening light she looked all but divine.

"What!—a visitor for us!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. de Lusignan, as a carriage came rolling up the street, and stopped at the gate. "Why, who can it be?"

"Oh! I hope it is not James!" I thought; but did not say, as my guardian rose and walked rather hastily toward the gate. He came back after a while, not with James, thank Heaven! but with a lady in black. She was stout, and walked slowly.

"My dear mademoiselle," he said, addressing his sister-in-law, and studiously avoiding to look at Mrs. Smith—"this is Mrs. Wood."

I suppose I was on the watch for every thing that might turn up, for I remembered, without effort, that the lodging-house keeper at Notting Hill was called Mrs. Wood. A dead silence fell on us all as my guardian uttered her name. My first quick look had been for Mrs. Smith. At the sight of the new-comer she had turned white as death. Her very lips were bloodless; but, save that she clasped her child more closely to her heart, she did not stir. The boy, wakening from his sleep, fixed his solemn brown eyes on the stranger, and watched her with that curious gaze of childhood which is apt to be so disconcerting. But Mrs. Wood was a full-blown woman of fifty; one of those women eased in flesh as in armor, and whose very plumpness is stolid. No emotion of any kind appeared on her immovable countenance.

"Ah! Mrs. Smith, how do you do, ma'am?" she said, addressing her, coolly. "I hope you have been quite well, ma'am, since we met at Notting Hill."

Mrs. Smith rose, with her boy in her arms. She did not give Mrs. Wood a look, but faced my guardian in all the pride of her imperial beauty. So may have looked Maria Theresa when she fired Hungarian hearts, and Hungarian swords flashed out at the oath, "*Moriamur pro Rege nostro Maria Theresa.*"

"Well, sir," she said, in a low voice, "what next?"

How grand she was in her calm defiance!—a fair young lioness at bay!

"Nothing," he answered, coolly. "I believe you will not deny now that you lived as my son's wife in Mrs. Wood's house at Notting Hill. I believe you will not deny now that you are that Louisa Jones whom my son married three years ago in Greenham Church."

It seemed to me as if even the faint hue of life which had remained in her white cheeks went out of them as he spoke. She looked so ghastly, that I thought she was going to faint; but she rallied again by a violent effort of her strong, passionate will.

"Granted," she said—"I was your son's wife. I married him, as you say, in What-do-you-call-it Church; and my name is Henrietta—no, Louisa Jones. I also lived with him at Notting Hill. What next?"

She tightened her hold of the child as she spoke, unconsciously telling us the secret of her fears.

"Why did you drive me to it?" he answered, in his most gentle tones; while a light both mellow and tender shone in his brown eyes. "What have I ever asked save that you would let me have my share of my son's child? Why have you robbed me of him for these two weary years?"

She turned upon him, the color burning in her cheeks, the light flaming from her eyes.

"Who robbed me of my husband?" she asked, in a low voice that ended in a wail. "Who from a wife turned me into a widow? Who doomed him to die the death that he died of? Did you think I had forgotten that? Did you think I wanted you to deal with this boy as you had dealt with his father?"

Mr. de Lusignan was silent, but his lips quivered. He was enduring torture, and she knew and saw it, and was not softened.

"What next?" she asked again. "Now that you have got me, what will you do with me?"

Mademoiselle Aubrey now interfered. She went up to Mrs. Smith, and, laying her hand gently on her arm, she said:

"My dear, be merciful!"

"Be merciful!" repeated Mrs. Smith, looking full in her eyes, and seizing her two hands in one of her own. "You who so loved him!—you tell me to be merciful to the man who killed him!"

"I want no mercy," said Mr. de Lusignan, sharply, and almost sternly; "this boy is my son's child, and I know what my right over him is."

"In—deed!" retorted Mrs. Smith, sitting down, and looking calm again. "I wonder what your right is, and how you will exercise it?"

She put down the child as if to defy my guar-

dian, more completely, to touch him. She leaned back in her seat, folded her hands on her lap in calm inaction, and began tossing her little right foot up and down in a saucy, mutinous way, which was familiar to her, while she looked at Mr. de Lusignan through her half-shut eyes.

"The law," began my guardian, whose brown eyes were deep and angry now.

"I'll tell you what," suddenly broke in Mrs. Smith, as her eye fell on Mrs. Wood, and speaking in a tone so untragic that we all stared, "I'm heartily tired of this; and if you will just send back that woman to England *at once*, why, I'll give in; if you won't, I shall step into the carriage that brought her, and be off this moment with my child, and you will attempt to stop me, if you dare, that's all!"

Mr. de Lusignan was taken by surprise, and he hesitated, while Mrs. Wood looked rather abashed, spite her coolness.

"I shall count ten while you make up your mind," said Mrs. Smith. "Harry, come here. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—"

"Stop!" cried Mr. de Lusignan, reddening with shame and anger. "Mrs. Wood cannot go back this moment, but to-morrow—"

She did not condescend to argue, but gathering her light burnous around her, rose quickly, and yet with so evident an intention of fulfilling her threat, that we all uttered an exclamation.

"I tell you I will not stop a moment with that woman in this house, this town, or this country!" she added, her voice rising with every word she uttered; "and what is more, Watkins shall go with her and see her safe at Notting Hill, or it is no bargain. And if you or she object, I go; and we shall see what right the law will give you here over my child or me."

Mr. de Lusignan saw that he had no other alternative than submission. He bit his lips, but he yielded, or he tried to yield, with a good grace.

"Ladies must be obeyed," he said, sarcastically. Then, turning to Mrs. Wood, who now looked both uncomfortable and discomfited, he led her away a few paces, and held some private conversation with her; while Mrs. Smith went to the foot of the staircase, and, raising her clear young voice, called out:

"Watkins, come down, if you please."

Thus summoned, the stolid Watkins soon appeared.

"That is Mrs. Wood," said her mistress, nodding toward the obnoxious lodging-house keeper, as if she had been some insect—"Mrs. Wood has been good enough to come all the way from Notting Hill to look at me. Now that she has seen

me, she is going back at once; and I want you, Watkins, to go with her and see her safe at Notting Hill again."

Watkins looked rather bewildered; but her obedience was of the unquestioning order, and all she said was:

"Very well, ma'am. Shall I go and put on my things?"

"Do—the carriage is waiting. And, Watkins, you are not to lose sight of her, you know."

"Very well, ma'am," said Watkins; and the mulish expression in her face was so apparent that I felt sure Mrs. Smith's orders would be carried out.

Strong wills rule this world. Before ten minutes were over, Mrs. Wood and Watkins had departed in company, and, in twenty-four hours, Watkins had returned to us, looking rather fagged, indeed, but otherwise much the same as ever. She had not gone as far as Notting Hill with Mrs. Wood, this being no longer that lady's place of abode; but she had seen her safe in Dover, and there left her.

When the carriage drove away, Mr. de Lusignan went up to his daughter-in-law, and said:

"You have had your way; and, now that we are going, I hope, to live in peace and amity, do you mind telling me why you have sent away that poor Mrs. Wood so ruthlessly?"

A smile of scorn curled her lovely lips, and, without looking at him, she answered:

"I hate traitors!"

"Surely you never reposed any confidence in Mrs. Wood?"

"No; but she betrayed to you for money"—here her eye fell upon him in quiet scorn—"the secret which I would have given my life's blood to guard. I could not endure to look at her for one minute longer. Then I knew that if she stayed here you would be questioning her concerning that past upon which, it seems, she was a spy. That past," she added, with quivering lips, "is mine; and, if I can prevent it, neither you nor any other living creature shall meddle with it. Of course, when you go to England you will see that creature and talk to her as much as you please; but I am rid of her till then."

"You might have trusted me," gravely said Mr. de Lusignan.

A smile flitted across her pale face—a smile very sweet, as all her smiles were, but so desolate—a smile that said so plainly, "I can put my trust in none," that it made my heart ache.

And now, as, spite our drama, the world around us had been going on all this time, the dinner-bell rang.

"I suppose we have a quarter of an hour, as usual?" said Mrs. Smith, in her easiest tones. "If so, I shall put on something cooler, for this heat is intolerable." And, taking her child by the hand, she went up the stairs, talking to him all the way.

"She bears it more bravely than I had expected," said my guardian, with a gleam of triumph in his eye.

"Do not be too sure of that," answered his sister-in-law, in a low tone.

And he was wrong, and she was right, as I found when I went up to Mrs. Smith's room, sent there, long after the quarter of an hour had expired, by my guardian.

She had exchanged her silk dress for one of black *barège*; her white shoulders gleamed through a black-lace *fichu*, fastened at the breast with a crimson rose; another, crimson too, was in her brown hair; and, save these two roses, she wore no ornament of any kind—not even a bracelet on her beautiful arms, which for the first time I saw bare. But, though she had thus adorned herself, as if to grace my guardian's triumph, she had allowed its bitterness to flood her very soul, if I might judge by the passion of grief in which I found her. She was half sitting on the edge of the bed, a very old-fashioned four-posted one, leaning against one of its dark mahogany pillars, and her arms were thrown above her head, in an attitude of abandonment and despair, which her wan face and sunken eyes confirmed.

"You come to tell me that I am late for dinner?" she said, languidly. "I suppose I am. Do you know what I was thinking of, Bessie? I was thinking that, if these words, 'O Death! where is thy victory, where is thy sting?' are true for others, they are not true for me. This very day Death has prevailed over me, and thrown me in the dust; this very day Death has pierced me with his dart, and made my flesh quiver with the pain. Oh! my love, my life, my darling!" she added, with a great cry, "if you were not dead, I should be strong!—if you were not dead, should I be here, eating the bread of the man who murdered you? While you lived I could hide in your kind arms, and feel safe there. And, Bessie, I was so happy—the happiest of women. I was dressed as you see me now when we met for the first time; I was dressed as you see me now when we parted, and from that first hour to that last it was perfect bliss. Think, then," she added, with a sudden flash of her blue eyes, and a quivering of her whole features—"think how I must hate that man below, who parted us forever!"

"Ah! think how he too suffers," I pleaded—"his son, his only son!"

"His son!" she echoed, with some scorn. "Bessie, they were as unlike as are light and darkness. One was all— But never mind; he is your guardian, and, in his way, kind to you, and I am spoiling his dinner and yours, and that dear, good Mademoiselle Aubrey's, so let us go down.—I suppose I look a fright?"

She glanced toward the glass, and, seeing her fair image there in all its beauty, she could not help smiling at herself, pleased like a child at her own loveliness; and, just taking up a black fan spangled with silver, which was lying on the table, she came down with me.

I was young then. How often I find myself writing those words! but time is the key to many a mystery which perplexes youth strangely. Time has explained to me why Mrs. Smith, after being in such a passion of grief up-stairs, was so pleasant below. She could not grieve long, she soon wearied of suffering, and went back to enjoyment for relief. Now, however hateful she might find Mr. de Lusignan, she could not help enjoying his evident admiration of her. He was by no means an old man. He could be a very agreeable man, and he admired her, and he was proud of her. He was proud that this lovely creature should have been his son's wife, and should be the mother of his grandchild. He had spared no trouble and no cost to establish his claim over her and her child, and he was ready, in a figurative sense, of course, to lay himself and his possessions at her feet. Every thing in his manner as they met at the dinner-table, implied homage, which his daughter-in-law accepted with mingled grace and dignity. Only once, when he addressed her by her own name, and called her Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, did she change color and show some emotion; but she soon came to herself again. After dinner we had the child, whom Hermance had taken, now that Watkins was gone, and, for the first time, his grandfather was allowed to caress him and play with him to his heart's content. I had had no idea that my guardian could indulge in such gambols as he now went on with, nor that this little, solemn-eyed Harry could laugh so shrilly as he did this evening. The two were soon fast friends, and Mrs. Harry Lusignan, fanning herself softly, looked on with a smile, and seemed pleased. Indeed, it had all been so genial during dinner-time, and it was all so pleasant during the evening, that the passionate outpourings of love and hate, which I had heard in Mrs. Smith's room, seemed like a dream to me. And thus it is in

this shifting scene of life, where nothing ever abides, nor sorrow, nor love, nor scorn, but every thing changes for evermore.

CHAPTER XIV.

EARLY the next morning there was a tap at my door, and, when I said "Come in," it was Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law who entered.

"Bessie," she said, in tones half sad, half mirthful, "I have come to bury Mrs. Smith. Your tongue slipped several times during dinner yesterday evening, and it would slip again and again if we did not find a remedy. Now, you must know," she added, giving me a wistful look, in which there was a world of tenderness that was for the past, not for me, "you must know that, if there be a sweetness in my new position, it is in hearing my own name. It softened me, spite of myself, to hear your guardian utter it last night; I could not feel half so angry with him after that as I felt before. Well, the remedy I have designed to Mrs. Smith's horror is, so far as you are concerned, my Christian name. I like calling you by yours, and I hope you will call me by mine."

"Louisa?" I said, half timidly.

"Louisa! Who's that? Oh! you mean Louisa Jones. My dear, you do not suppose that is my name, do you?"

Before I could answer, she added:

"I was married in that name, but it is not mine. You see all we wanted was secrecy, and Henry had his reasons and I had mine. My real name," she added, looking at me with a smile, "is Elizabeth; but I have never been loved enough to be called Bessie. I have been and shall be Elizabeth to the end of the chapter. So, while you are Bessie to me, I can be Elizabeth to you."

"Elizabeth what?" was on the tip of my tongue, but I had grace enough to restrain the question. And Mrs. de Lusignan volunteered no other information. Her maiden surname, her bringing up, her parentage, she was silent upon. What I learned, I learned later, but not from her. There was nothing so very mysterious in her early history, nothing that she could not have told me then, if she chose. But that story was the key to the story of her marriage, and that she had resolved never to reveal to Mr. de Lusignan. She had reason for her reticence, but there was a good deal of perversity in it too.

She was called Elizabeth Clare, and that name

was all she ever knew concerning her birth and origin. For all she could tell her patrician beauty might have come down to her from a long line of fair ancestresses, or be the free gift of bountiful Nature to the unacknowledged offspring of some wealthy churl. For Elizabeth was no poor man's child. Imperfect though her education was, money had been lavished upon it; and, when she was removed from an expensive school at Highgate to the comfortable home of the lady under whose care she was placed, she received an income of three hundred a year, with the intimation that it would be continued till she married; then, whether she became the wife of a peer of the realm or of the poorest clerk who ever sat on a stool in an office, that income was to be forfeited, and the source from which it had flowed to go back forever to its early darkness.

These were hard terms—terms which said all too plainly to the solitary girl, "You shall never know from what stock you spring." Little wonder was it that this stern and cold nurture should leave indelible traces on the character of Elizabeth—traces which often disappointed many whom her gracious beauty attracted. To me, when I knew her story, she seemed like a flower that springs from a barren rock—as lovely a thing as ever waved in the sweet summer air; but neither generous earth nor tender moisture feeds its young roots, and so the sap of life does not always flow freely round its green heart. Nature had made her warm, generous, and loving, but her cold, unloved youth had warped these gifts. They could not be destroyed, but they were marred, and they often turned into bitterness, or went waste.

And so it was with all her qualities. They were precious and many, yet often they led her into error. She was brave, and had the gift of reserve rare in one so young; but her courage became recklessness when she married a penniless man, and her reserve was almost guilty reticence when she withheld from him the knowledge that by that marriage she forfeited her income. Some will blame her for continuing to receive that income when her legal claim to it was over; but, if she allowed the solicitor through whom it came to her to believe that, though she called herself Mrs. Smith, and was the mother of a child, she was yet no man's wife, her motive was not sordid but heroic. She endured shame, and would have endured all the hardships of poverty, had there been need to do so, to keep inviolate and unbroken the faith of secrecy she had pledged to the dead.

But all this I did not know then. I only knew

that Mr. de Lusignan's handsome daughter-in-law was called Elizabeth, and that the queenly name suited well her stately beauty. I also knew that her father-in-law, whether through policy or inclination, or for both reasons, became at once her liege subject, and that Mademoiselle Aubrey—my dear mademoiselle, as I used to call her—was a passive rebel. This seemed very strange to me—indeed, it was all the more unaccountable that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan laid herself out in a hundred ways to please her. Mr. de Lusignan she treated in a very cool and off-hand manner, now and then contradicting him flatly, for no reason that I could see, setting him right without ceremony whenever he happened to be wrong, regarding his wishes as little as the barest politeness allowed, and altogether looking down at him *du haut de sa grandeur*, as I could not help telling her. She only laughed at the imputation.

"He does not complain, does he?" she asked, saucily.

"What would it avail him to complain?" was my reply.

"Nothing," she answered, with a little, short laugh. "He should have let me be quiet in Barbison, and not brought me here."

But, with Mademoiselle Aubrey, there was nothing of this waywardness. To her Elizabeth's manner was all deference and softness. She heard her respectfully, never differed from her, and quietly did all she could to win her regard. She studied her tastes, found out what flowers she preferred, what books she liked best, and spared no pains to get them. She did far more. She only tolerated Mr. de Lusignan's fondness for little Harry, looked on with cold eyes at the tenderness he lavished upon him; but it was almost openly that she sought Mademoiselle Aubrey's affection for the child.

I remember one evening in the first week that followed the discovery of her secret, we were all seated in the garden enjoying the delicious freshness which had followed on a burning day. Mr. de Lusignan had lured Harry away, and was playing at hide-and-seek with him in the thickets, when Hermance came with a letter for him. I suppose he wanted to read it, and dismissed the child, for he came running toward us flushed and warm, and ran into his mother's outstretched arms, laughing merrily. She took and kissed him, then suddenly went and put him on Mademoiselle Aubrey's knees. She received him smilingly, and put down her book—but his mother was not content.

"Since you so loved the father," said Eliza-

beth, in a tone of gentle reproach, "why not love the son more than you do?"

"I do love him," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey, kissing his little olive cheek very fondly.

"As much as if he were his cousin's boy?" asked Elizabeth, looking down at her.

Mademoiselle Aubrey turned rather pale.

"You have no right to say that," she remarked, in a low tone. "The dead were not jealous."

"But I am both living and jealous," interrupted Elizabeth a little impatiently. "I want more than I get for my boy and me."

She said this so winningly that it was not in Mademoiselle Aubrey's heart to resist her. She smiled up in her face one of her kind, genial smiles, and she was going to say something very kind, no doubt, when my guardian came up to her with his open letter in his hand.

"Did you not tell me that you knew the Herberts?" he said, addressing his sister-in-law.

"No," she answered, after a moment's pause; "but I told you the other day, when we spoke about them, that I had heard the name mentioned by Bessie."

In a moment my guardian's brown eyes were full upon me. "To be sure," he said. "I remember now. They are cousins of yours, Mignonne, are they not?"

I shook my head.

"No, sir, I am not related to Mr. Herbert; but my cousin, James Carr, is, through his mother."

"Well, and what is he like?"

"I never saw him."

"Well, but what does your cousin say that he is like? Don't be stingy, child! I happen to want to know all about the Herberts just now."

"There is only one—he is the last left of the family—so James Carr says."

"You don't believe that, do you, Mignonne?" good-humoredly said my guardian. "The last of an old name is always an invention of poets and novelists. There is never a really last one of the family in every-day life. Some other fellow always turns up."

"But, indeed," I argued, "James ought to know, for they are cousins and friends, and James was always telling me something or other about him."

"My dear, I again entreat you not to be stingy!" pathetically remarked my guardian. "What does your estimable cousin say of his cousin?"

His bantering tone made me quite bold.

"Oh! that he is very handsome—wonderful—"

ly handsome!—to begin with. Very like his mother, who was a great Irish beauty, and who married old Mr. Herbert.”

“My dear, I implore you to be lenient toward Mr. Herbert. I happen to know that he was not fifty when he married this Irish beauty.”

“I did not know he was so young,” I replied, trying to look innocent. “Well, he died soon after the present Mr. Herbert was born, and for some years mother and child lived with his guardian at a beautiful place called Warrensford. But one morning they were both missing, and it was found that Mrs. Herbert had fled in the night with her boy. It seems that his guardian wanted to take him from her, and place him in some great public school, and that she had resolved the child should never leave her while she could keep him.”

“Indeed!” dryly said my guardian. “And, pray, where did this wise lady go to?”

“To Rome—where they remained some years. After that they travelled about, for Mrs. Herbert lost her health, and became so restless that she could never stay long anywhere. I believe they went all over the world. James used to call Mr. Herbert ‘Sinbad the Sailor.’”

“Of course, Mr. Carr is a traveller?” here put in Mrs. Henry de Lusignan.

“No,” I answered, a little surprised. “Why should he be?”

“Oh! the sobriquet he bestowed on his friend made me conclude he was a great traveller—of the old school, perhaps, but still a great traveller.”

Mr. de Lusignan laughed, and I felt a tightening at my throat. Why had Elizabeth spoken thus? I would ten times sooner she had said any thing unkind of me, than of good, earnest James Carr. She might not believe that I loved him, but, by the pain her slighting tone gave me, I knew how very dear to me was my betrothed cousin.

“What next, Mignonne?” said Mr. de Lusignan, seeing that I was silent. “This Sinbad the Sailor came back to England, I suppose?”

“Yes, when he was of age and his own master—free from his guardian’s power, I mean—his mother and he both returned to England. It was then Mrs. Herbert died, and that James Carr and Mr. Herbert met again after so many years. Soon after James Carr saw him he called upon me at Kensington, and I remember his telling me how handsome young Herbert was, and how ignorant. His mother was a clever woman, but wilful and eccentric, and she never had her son taught but two things—riding and fencing.”

“An epitome of an education, certainly,” remarked Mr. de Lusignan. “Mothers do commit these mistakes, sometimes.”

“If this was a shaft aimed at Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, it fell harmless at her feet, and she let it lie there, without even deigning to pick it up.

“What next, Mignonne?” again asked my guardian.

“James Carr liked Mr. Herbert very much. He said he was not only handsome, but brave and truthful in a rare degree; but I think, for my part, that it was the story of Mr. Herbert’s dog that won James Carr’s heart.”

“A story of a dog!” remarked Elizabeth; “oh! do let us have it. I delight in stories of dogs. They are half of them made up,” she added, laughing, “but still I do like them.”

“But this is not a made-up story,” I insisted, “for James had it—”

“From Mr. Herbert, of course,” suggested Mr. de Lusignan.

“No, indeed,” I replied, a little warmly; “he had it from an eye-witness. Mr. Herbert is too modest to say such things of himself.”

“Why, what wonderful tale is this?”

It was my guardian who spoke.

“It is the tale of a brave heart,” I said, daringly. I did not care much about this unknown Mr. Herbert, but James Carr was fond of him, and, next to the pleasure of praising dear James, was that of winning golden opinions, if I could, for his friend.

“We are all attention, Mignonne,” kindly said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

“Well, it is not a long story, at all events. Mr. Herbert, his mother, and his dog, a great Newfoundland, were on board a steamer—on the Mediterranean, I believe, but I am not sure—when the dog, who was playing with his master, fell overboard.”

“Are you sure of that part of the story, Mignonne?” here perversely interrupted my guardian; “I consider it most difficult to fall overboard a steamer—for a dog, especially.”

“But he did fall overboard, sir,” I replied, rather warmly, “for if he had not fallen where would my story be?” Mr. de Lusignan confessed this was an unanswerable argument, and I was allowed to go on. “Well, the sea was calm, and the dog swam bravely alongside the steamer, but, of course, this could not last long. His master ran up to the captain, and asked him to stop the boat at once.

“‘Impossible,’ answered the captain; ‘it is against my orders. I can only stop for a man overboard—but for a dog—!’”

"'Oh, very well,' said Mr. Herbert, and in a moment he had jumped overboard, and was swimming by the Newfoundland. Of course the boat was stopped, and master and dog were picked up—and there is the story."

"Pretty, if true," said Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, looking less interested than I had expected; but Mademoiselle Aubrey's blue eyes were glistening.

"You were right, Mignonne," she said. "This is the story of a brave heart."

"And of a good swimmer," remarked Mr. de Lusignan; "pity a fine young fellow like that should be so awfully ignorant, though."

"Yes," I replied, "James Carr was always lamenting it."

"I suppose they were friends," suggested Elizabeth, as if she had forgotten that I had said so.

"Yes, great friends," I answered, in my simplicity.

"Then Heaven save me from my friends, that is all," she retorted, with a short laugh.

"Ignorant, twenty-five, and tolerably rich; then he will go to the dogs," said my guardian, coolly.

"Oh! I hope not," I replied, eagerly. "James Carr is so fond of him, and says he is the finest fellow in the world."

"Mignonne," said Mr. de Lusignan, gravely, "the man who has no compulsory tasks to fill his life, no cultivated mind to give him an interest in the hundred things that are the resources of rich and educated men, that man inevitably deteriorates as he grows old. There is a trite old saying about the end of things, '*Finus coronat opus.*' True; but then it is also the end that spoils nine-tenths of the grand things of this world. The beginnings are glorious, the endings, woe betide us! are poor, mean, and contemptible. And so it is with human lives—the best end badly. Open biography, and tell me, if you can, what man ever knew how to die at the right time. This Mr. Herbert has youth, beauty, and strength, now—great gifts. What will remain of them when he is fifty?—and being what he is, an uneducated, purposeless man, just tell me what will have supplied the want of these? He will deteriorate—he must—he cannot help himself."

"I hope not," I said again; "for indeed he has more than youth, beauty, and strength. He has a fine nature."

"Ah! to be sure; he leaped into the sea to save his Newfoundland."

"Yes, and he loved his mother. He fell ill with grief when she died, and not even her footstool has changed its place in her room."

"There, there," said my guardian, stretching out his hands, deprecatingly. "I give in. Make a hero of him, by all means, Bessie. *C'est de votre âge.*"

The dew was beginning to fall. We all returned to the house, and spoke of Mr. Herbert no more.

I went up rather early to my room that evening. I wanted to write to James, so I sat by my open window through the fading twilight, and I had not the heart to close it, even when it was night, and the moon full, round, and solemn, rose above the slumbering trees, and looked in at me, casting a square of cold light on the polished floor.

Fair moon, so loved of the poets, you whose beauty cannot be marred by all the foolish things said and written about you, I can never imagine you to be a peopled world. Surely you are a dead planet, as this earth of ours, so living now, may be dead some day yet. Ay, the moon is a graveyard, where millions upon millions of generations lie sleeping. No wonder she looks so sad, so pale, as she climbs the sky, or vanishes down into the depths of our ether. Let her; we too may be the poet's moon of some fresher, more vigorous world than this, some world now rolling empty in space, still untenanted, still waiting for its Adam and its untempted Eve. May they be wiser than our first parents were; may their children be less tired, less sorrowful than we are!

I am not sure, however, that these were the speculations floating through my brain when dear Mademoiselle Aubrey came in upon me, asking me to thread her needle, and uttering an exclamation of wonder as she found me sitting without any light. I lit a candle at once, while my good friend sat down in an easy-chair, and, though her needle was threaded, did not seem inclined to go.

"I am interrupting you," she said, glancing at my letter.

I hastened to answer that I could finish it to-morrow, and I shut up my blotting-case. She looked at me, leaning her cheek upon her hand, saying nothing, and still not going away.

"You are a trusting little thing," she said at length, "and I like you for it, Mignonne, but do not trust too much."

I could not help opening my eyes rather wide.

"Yes, you are a generous creature," she continued; "you give much, and ask for nothing in return. But, as the world goes, Mignonne, it is not wise."

I felt my eyes opening wider than ever.

"Indeed, I give little or nothing," I said, hastily; "indeed, I am afraid I am rather stingy."

"Indeed," she remarked, with her kindest smile, and rising she took my hand, and looked into my face still very kindly.

"You must not think," she said, "that I think Mrs. Smith—Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, I mean—could ever betray a trust that you or any one would repose in her."

"Of course not," I replied, eagerly. "Of course, you never meant that."

"I did not," she rejoined, gravely. "Nor did I mean that she would receive affection and not give you affection in return. She has a warm, loving heart."

"Oh! so loving," I rejoined, eagerly; for I had been afraid that Mademoiselle Aubrey had meant to imply the very reverse of this.

"A loving heart," she said again; "but one that has suffered, and that has learned to suffer, in silence. You must allow for that, Mignonne, or your heart will ache."

I did not answer. Indeed, I did not know what to say, nor what was my friend's meaning.

"Did it not strike you," she remarked, "that she knew quite as much about that Mr. Herbert as you told us?"

"Oh! that is impossible," I said, eagerly.

"And you do not think she knew the story of the dog?"

"Dear mademoiselle, it was she who asked me to tell it."

I suppose this was an unanswerable argument, for Mademoiselle Aubrey bade me a good-night. She opened my door, and there, on the landing, stood Mrs. Henry de Lusignan with a book and some lovely roses in her hand. She could not have heard a word that we had uttered, for we had both spoken low; yet I gave a guilty start, and I saw her beautiful face flush all over; but she smiled.

"They have just come," she said—"the book and the tea-roses; and, seeing your door open, I was going to put them into your room."

"Like a fairy," replied Mademoiselle Aubrey, smiling in her face, and looking at her very kindly.

The little offering had touched her to the heart, and these roses silenced her, if not forever, yet for many a day.

CHAPTER XV.

"*Chi offende non perdona*," says the Italian proverb. Well, it is hard to forgive one whom we have wronged, for there is no magnanimity about it, as there is, for instance, in the forgiveness of the men and women who have sinned against us. And magnanimity, as setting us all right with ourselves, is, in sooth, a very pleasant inducement to virtue. But still, there are generous souls who can injure, or attempt to injure, their neighbors, and yet forgive them; and of these Mademoiselle Aubrey was one.

She had tried to warn me against giving too much love or trust to Elizabeth; and she did not resent that warning against her. Far more, it was from the evening on which this wrong was attempted that she too yielded to the secret wiles of the charmer. I do not think her judgment was warped, or that her opinion was altered, but her heart was won, and she let her heart rule her. These two became friends—not as Elizabeth and I were friends, in pleasant companionship, for the chasm of years is one which friendship rarely crosses, but in confidence and trust. Yes, even I could see that Elizabeth, who silenced Mr. de Lusignan whenever he attempted to utter a word concerning that past which was the great bond between them, who was so reticent with me that Mademoiselle Aubrey had felt it as a breach of friendship—I could see that with the aunt of her dead husband she was willing to talk of his youth and early manhood. Several times when I came upon them, I found that their discourse was of the two boys whom Mademoiselle Aubrey had loved so well in life, and whom she could not separate in death. The subject was invariably dropped with my presence—not, I believe, that either wished to exclude me from it, as from a secret, but because I, a stranger, had, and could have, nothing in common with that grief. Once mademoiselle made a sort of an apology on the subject.

"I never could talk to your guardian as I talk to Elizabeth," she said; "his self-condemnation is too bitter and too keen, but with her I can open my whole heart; for, Mignonne, she knew my darling well, and sometimes I fancy—it may be but a dream of mine—that to him also she was very dear. I always did think that these two boys loved the same girl, and, when I look at her lovely face, I cannot help thinking that to have loved and lost her must have been the great trouble of his life—that trouble which he would not tell, even to me."

I confess I too thought that Elizabeth's link

with the past was a double one, and that hence arose her reticence. I thought it natural that she should open her heart, as much as she could open it, to the aunt of her dead husband, and the faithful friend of her unsuccessful lover, if mademoiselle's conjecture was indeed a correct one. To me all this seemed as it should be, but not so to my guardian. He looked with jealousy on this good understanding which had suddenly sprung up between his sister-in-law and his son's widow; and once his displeasure was not merely felt but spoken.

The house in Portland Place had been an expensive affair, I believe, and we had come to a furnished house in Fontainebleau for economy's sake. But Mr. de Lusignan, who could not be happy long without spending, soon found out a new way of parting with his money. I had gone up to my room one morning after breakfast, when Hermance came with a message from my guardian.

"He wanted mademoiselle at once," added Hermance. "Monsieur was in a great hurry."

I felt half frightened. Was it, could it be, any thing about James Carr?—for, I cannot say why, but every fear of my quiet life now pointed toward the best and dearest friend I had. I was a great coward, I suppose, and had never got over that fit of Othello jealousy to which it had pleased my cousin to treat me on the eve of my departure.

I therefore went down in some trepidation, and found Mr. de Lusignan alone in the dining-room, his swarthy features all alive with unusual excitement.

"I have got something for you, Mignonne," he said, in great glee; "but are you prepared to brave dust, cobwebs, and spiders? Come, be heroic. A Watteau is worth it surely."

"A Watteau! Oh! where is it?" and I looked round the dining-room.

"You silly thing! Did I not speak of dust, cobwebs, and spiders?"

"Then it is up in the lumber-room," I said, shrewdly; for there was a lumber-room in the upper regions of the house, as I knew, one of my trunks having been consigned to it.

"Precisely; in the lumber-room. I have just been there and discovered it, and got its history from Hermance. It seems that Baron Regnier's great-great-grandfather was a goodly old gentleman, whose three wives had blessed him with an ample progeny. This patriarch took a fancy, toward the close of his life, to collect all the youth and beauty of his descendants, and to set them keeping lambs, piping flutes, dancing sara-

bands, and eating cherries, all in a Watteau, which I found in the lumber-room with its face to the wall."

"And is it a Watteau?" I asked, in some wonder.

"This is a skeptical, doubting age," sighed my guardian. "The very babes put questions, and say, 'Is it a Watteau?' Bessie, my dear, when you are as old as I am, you will feel the profound wisdom of the French adage, '*Il n'y a que la foi qui sauve.*' So, now, are you willing to come up and see the Watteau?"

I professed my willingness, and up to the lumber-room we went. Hermance had a saying about the amount of dust which every man and woman is bound, by the Fates who preside over these things, to swallow before death. Surely, the share allotted to me must have been considerably diminished in the lumber-room that morning. I was half choked, and could scarcely look at the Watteau for coughing. When I did look I was pleased with what I saw. I know I have a depraved taste, and that unreal pictures are all wrong, but I like them, as I like fairy-tales, to this day. They are nonsense, granted, but then they are delightful, which sensible things are not always.

Every age has its *beau idéal*, and that of fine ladies under the reign of the last French Louis seems to have been wonderfully pastoral. To wear satin petticoats, high-heeled shoes, dainty bodices, and in that attire to feed sheep, milk-white, adorned with pink and blue favors, and wander in delicious valleys, watered by bubbling streams, in which reigned the freshness of a perpetual spring, was the cream of an ideal life to these fair comtesses and marquises. Some one wanted a wolf in Florian's sweet Idyls. I wonder, Watteau, did no one ever ask you for that dreary wolf Winter in the pretty stories you painted so well?

"Of course you like it," said Mr. de Lusignan, after I had expressed my admiration, with the frank enthusiasm of eighteen; "and, of course, it is a Watteau."

"I don't know, sir," I replied, cautiously. "But what matter?"

"What matter! You little heretic, are you like Juliet, who proclaimed that there was nothing in a name. Mignonne, Juliet was all wrong. Name is every thing; and she would not have cared for Romeo if he had not been a Montague. Now, take the asphodel, for instance—I am no botanist, thank Heaven, and I neither know, nor wish to know, any thing about the asphodel, save that it blooms in Elysium, where all the heroes and the poets go."

"There are onions that belong to the order of the *Asphodelaceæ*," I began, perversely.

"Onions!" cried my guardian, stopping his ears. "O Bessie, Bessie, how often must I entreat you not to crush me with your matter-of-fact ways! Was it not purposely that I kept true to my Elysian flower, and could know nothing of my earthly one; and do you tell me of onions?—call them bulbs, at least."

"Hermance raves about onion-soup—shall we call it bulb-soup henceforth?"

The idea tickled my fancy, and I laughed till the tears ran down my cheek. My guardian looked at me and smiled, then he looked at the Watteau again, then once more at me.

"Which is the better of the two, Mignonne?" he asked, very kindly—"to look at you or at the Watteau?"

"That is silent, sir," I replied, trying to look demure.

"Yes, that is the best and the worst of pictures, they are silent. That is a very deep remark of yours, Mignonne; but I dare say you know nothing about its profundity. And now let us impart our discovery to the good people below."

He went down in one of his happiest, most genial moods, for there was something almost boyish in the facility with which the simplest things could awaken his keen sense of enjoyment; and before five minutes had gone by his dark face was convulsed with passionate emotion, his eyes flashed fire, and the thick veins in his forehead were swollen with anger. It happened thus: We entered the drawing-room rather suddenly; Mademoiselle Aubrey and Elizabeth were sitting side by side in one of the windows, and in its light I saw them well, both framed by the old yellow curtains, as in a picture. Elizabeth's figure was bowed, her face was buried in her hands, and she was sobbing passionately, as I could see by the convulsive motion of her shoulders under the black-lace *fichu* which she wore. Mademoiselle Aubrey was leaning back in her chair, looking at Elizabeth very wistfully; she was not crying, but her face was troubled and pale, and on her lap lay the miniature portrait which she had once shown to me. What I saw my guardian saw too, and at once came that change in his whole aspect which I have recorded above.

"I beg your pardon," he said, very bitterly. "I am intruding. I believe you were discussing those subjects which are forbidden in my presence."

Elizabeth raised her tear-stained face, and looked at him with a sort of scorn.

"Mademoiselle Aubrey was showing me the portrait of my dead husband as a child," she said, rising as she spoke.

"And of my dead son," he retorted, his features quivering with emotion. "Perhaps you were more open and communicative to his aunt, Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, than you have ever been to his father."

Mademoiselle Aubrey looked at her angry brother-in-law.

"It was of Harry we were talking," she said, soothingly; "not of Henry."

"Ay, to be sure. Harry was nothing to you; but you loved him better than your sister's child."

He was very angry indeed—so angry that he forgot the usual reserve and respect of his bearing toward his sister-in-law. But though Nature had made her quick-tempered, will and judgment kept her patient; she looked at him as he now walked up and down the room in mingled grief and anger, and she said, quietly, but firmly:

"Since my mother died, I have loved no one so well as the boy whom I reared. I do not deny it. But I can defy you, Mr. de Lusignan, to say that your son and my nephew was not very dear to me."

Elizabeth here flung her arms around Mademoiselle Aubrey's neck, and, smiling through her tears, said tenderly:

"You loved them both; and their love was the truest love that ever bound man to man. Whichever of the two you most loved, it shall make no difference to me now—no difference." And, glancing at Mr. de Lusignan, she smiled at him a very sweet but defiant smile. The color deepened in his cheek to crimson. He felt that he had been ungenerous and unwise, and it cut him to the quick to have been so, for, if his nature was wayward, it was not mean.

"And I too loved them," he said, speaking in a low tone, as he suddenly stood still in the middle of the drawing-room; "and surely I proved it. In life I gave them both a father's love; and in death, surely—surely," he added, his full voice quivering as he spoke, "I gave them both a father's sorrow."

There was a deep silence after this. Then Elizabeth, disentwining her arms from Mademoiselle Aubrey's neck, left the room, and I followed her.

"Bessie," she said, laying her hand on mine, as I closed the door, "it will be war to the end of the chapter between that man and me."

War, indeed, it always was after a certain fashion; but assuredly not such war as I understood

by the word. For this was in the morning; and, though my guardian and his daughter-in-law remained on the *qui vive* for the afternoon, they both relaxed in the severity of their demeanor after dinner, and were on delightful terms before it was night. They could not help it. Mr. de Lusignan could not be really angry with a beautiful woman; and my fair Elizabeth could not be long vexed with an admirer whose admiration was always in perfect taste. Moreover, Mr. de Lusignan had the great advantage that he was not, and could not be, a lover. His homage for this beautiful star was of the kind which need never change, never grow more, or, worse still, become less. He did not covet it, nor foolishly ask it, to come down to him from its native heavens. The distance of years from which he gazed at it gave it a purer radiance, a softer and more tender light, than would have done a nearer view. And, if Elizabeth was too lovely and too much accustomed to worship not to take it as her due, she was also far too delicate and refined not to be very fastidious as to its nature. Now, it is often the lot of beautiful women to be coveted, like the rose, by every outstretched hand, but to be set like a planet in the sky is a rarer fate.

It is only fair to state, however, that on this evening the Watteau helped to this good understanding. No sooner had my guardian mentioned it than Elizabeth's blue eyes sparkled.

"A Watteau!" she cried, all ardor. "Oh! let us see it!" For she could not live without excitement of some kind, and, failing better things, a Watteau in the lumber-room was welcome. So up we went again to view the picture by candle-light, Mademoiselle Aubrey wisely remaining below, and saying she could wait till the morning.

"What is a Watteau?" whispered Elizabeth to me on the way. For a knowledge of art, ancient and modern, was not one of her gifts.

Once more we made our way through trunks, packages, and crazy old furniture, to the picture.

"There!" cried my guardian, enthusiastically, as he moved the light up and down to help our survey. "There is delicacy for you; and flesh and poetry, and all that a man's soul and heart could put in a pseudo-pastoral."

"And is that a Watteau!" said Elizabeth, turning away from it with disappointment—"dingy old thing!"

"It is a Watteau of the first water," retorted my guardian, warmly; "is it not, Mignonne?"

"I don't know, sir, but I think it is a fine picture."

Elizabeth raised her eyebrows and laughed. She had neither love nor veneration for antiquities of any kind, old lace excepted, and she would have said so in the face of a Raffaele or a Correggio. That daring honesty was one of her many attractions. I never knew one whose tastes and opinions had been less influenced by conventional rules than those of Elizabeth de Lusignan.

My admiration of the Watteau, however, was as genuine as her contempt, and it secured me golden opinions from my guardian. A hobby was to him what excitement was to Elizabeth, and, having found this, he now rode it without mercy. After having come, for the twentieth time, to the conclusion that the picture in the lumber-room was a Watteau, he resolved to secure the prize, and wrote to Baron Regnier to ask to purchase it. The baron proved tractable, and for a handsome consideration the picture became my guardian's property. He was delighted, especially because Mr. Gray had not got it, I am convinced. He cleaned and varnished it himself, got a magnificent frame for it, and had it hung up in the drawing-room, where, even Elizabeth confessed, that it looked well under these improved surroundings.

I do not know whether it was a Watteau or not, but I am sure that it was a beautiful picture. Years have passed since I saw it, and I have not yet forgotten the freshness of those green bowers, the coolness of those still waters, the beauty of those fair women. It took a strange hold of my imagination, perhaps because it had been a reality, and not a mere painter's dream. I knew that these bright eyes had had life and light once on a time, that these rosy cheeks and plump, white shoulders had been warm and living; nay, the very silks and satins had been true, and they, too, attracted me. There was a flowered blue petticoat, which I would have given my ears to have had the like of, and a red-kid shoe that used to set me wild with envy. For, though dear Uncle John had given me an all but classical education, I was still a daughter of Eve, and I liked dress and its belongings very dearly.

About a fortnight after the first discovery of the Watteau, my guardian had business which called him to Paris, and it was agreed that we were all to go with him, and do some of that shopping without which true women cannot exist. We were all ready, and waiting only for Elizabeth, when, to our great surprise, she came down in home attire, and said, quietly:

"I am so sorry that I cannot go with you, but Harry is bilious, and I can neither take him nor trust him alone with Watkins."

I do not know that Mr. de Lusignan wanted his daughter-in-law particularly in Paris, but he never liked any of his plans to be interfered with, and he looked much annoyed.

"Shall we put it off till to-morrow?" he suggested.

"I dare say Harry would be bilious to-morrow," she said, with provoking coolness; and she sat down in one of the deep arm-chairs, and, calmly folding her hands upon her lap, looked demurely at her rosy fingers.

Mr. de Lusignan darted a quick, keen glance at her; but I was so far from suspicion myself that I never guessed what the real meaning of that look might be. Moreover, I was sadly disappointed. I had made up my mind that Elizabeth and I were to spend half the day in the Palais Royal, and now what would even that magic palace be without her?

"Since Harry is bilious," said Mr. de Lusignan, rather sarcastically, "we must go without Harry's mamma."

"Yes," replied Elizabeth, in a provoking way, which she had to perfection, "I am afraid you must."

And she laughed as if she enjoyed his annoyance, and indeed I have no doubt that she did.

We accordingly drove away without Mrs. Henry de Lusignan. Her father-in-law looked very moody all the way to the station, and several times wished he had asked Elizabeth to telegraph to him in case the child got worse, for we were to spend no less than two days in Paris. I suggested that Elizabeth would be sure to write if the child was really ill.

"She does not even know what hotel we stop at," said my guardian, impatiently. "No, we must come back this evening, that is all."

Now, whether he knew it or not, Mademoiselle Aubrey's errand in Paris could not be dispatched in one afternoon, for she was going to see an old friend who lived in Versailles, and who happened to be away when we were at the Hôtel Meyerbeer in the spring. I saw an expression of deep disappointment cross her face; but she said not a word. Long ago she had made it a rule never to interfere with her brother-in-law's plans, however much they might clash with her own; and thanks to that forbearance, these two, spite my guardian's wayward temper, had always lived in peace. Still I knew how she looked forward to that meeting.

"Only think, Mignonne," she had said to me that morning, "we were school-girls together, Blanche and I, and now see how Fate makes us meet again after so many chances and so many

years. She, an English girl, the widow of a Frenchman, is living in Versailles, with her French children around her; and I, a Frenchwoman, am like a stranger and a visitor in my own country, with my English brother-in-law and my English nephew's child. I wonder if we shall know each other again, Mignonne? I remember her well—a rosy young thing—the Sylph, we used to call her. She writes that she has got stout. I cannot believe it—my Sylph stout!—impossible!"

And she had laughed with pleasure, and her blue eyes had glistened as she had told me this. And now she was to be balked of that joy! I could not bear it. A bright idea struck me, and I said, eagerly:

"Please, sir, I do not care to go to Paris for an afternoon. If you like it, I will drive home again, and telegraph to you if any thing should ail Harry."

I was surprised even then at the eagerness with which my guardian embraced a proposal which I fully expected to be scouted with disdain.

"Why, Bessie, that is a capital idea!" he exclaimed. "As you say, it is not worth your while to go to Paris for a few hours only. Better come another time with Mrs. de Lusignan and me. I shall be sure to want to go again soon. You can go back at once, for here's the station: and we are only just in time by the clock. Good-by."

He jumped down, hurried off his sister-in-law, and, bidding the coachman drive me home, was gone in a moment.

"Oh! my goodness!" I thought, when I had fairly turned my back on the station, and the carriage was rattling along the stony street which leads to Fontainebleau, "he has never told me the name of the hotel after all."

CHAPTER XVI.

Mr. dismay did not last long. With the ready hopefulness of youth, I promptly concluded that Mr. de Lusignan would remember his omission, and send me word of his whereabouts by an early post. Besides, I argued, in the same buoyant mood, why should Harry be ill, unless he did it on purpose, little monkey, while his grandpapa was away? Bilious!—well, he was very often bilious, especially after being out with Watkins, who took it for granted that she was to rule her young charge by the law of persuasion, and

whose prime-minister under that wise government was the pastry-cook.

Having settled that matter, I leaned back in the carriage, and enjoyed my solitude and my liberty. There is a pleasure, no doubt, in the sense of independence and irresponsible action, for no sooner did I feel alone and free than I dismissed the driver, and bade him set me down in the market-place, instead of taking me home, as he had been told. At length I could indulge myself in a view of that market which had been all but forbidden ground to me, and was therefore doubly attractive. Mademoiselle Aubrey did not care for going to market—not even for flowers; and my guardian scouted the mere idea.

"I am a man of sophisticated tastes, Bessie," he said. "I have no pleasure in looking at undressed vegetables; and I like fruit by wax-light best—when the *épergne* is on the table, and there is a glitter of crystal and silver."

"Indeed, sir," I remonstrated, "if you were to see the big cabbages tumbling about, and the white cauliflowers, and the basketfuls of eggs—"

"Bessie, how often must I implore you not to crush me with your matter-of-fact ways? You do not know me, child. Why, if I had the power, cabbages should grow ready cooked, as partridges rained down ready-roasted from the sky in the wonderful land of Cockayne. Yes, I would do away with the noble art of cookery, and there should not be a saucepan nor a broom nor a duster in the land. I, for one, shall always regret that the time is gone by when Brownies swept the hearth clean in the night, and the dust and turmoil of a houseful of servants, not to speak of board and wages, was unknown in a decent family."

Thanks to this fastidiousness of Mr. de Lusignan, I had only had cursory glimpses of the market of Fontainebleau; so, this being market-day, I realized the desire of my heart, and, with a feeling of daring and half wickedness upon me, I got down and mingled with the crowd. What a shrill and noisy crowd it was! What screaming, what haggling went on in that hot place, and under the shade of the low lime-trees that grow around it! I wondered what the bronze effigy of the general standing there thought of it all. He was born in this little town, I believe, and, perhaps, he had played as a child on this very spot; may be he had lingered near these stalls of tempting plums, so rich, so dark, so large, looking at them with covetous boyish eyes; or, he had pined with vain longing for these Reine Claudes of golden green lying coyly on broad vine-leaves. In the very din and dust of battle the

place may have flashed back upon him as a glimpse of some lost Eden; for I take it as granted that we have all been in paradise, and all lost it through sin and folly, or by the inevitable curse of Time. And now that he had come back to it at last, that he had done his day's work, got his wages, and been raised on a pedestal by his admiring countrymen, did he care so very much for that vision of brown peasant women in white caps sitting in the sun, or driving hard bargains from under the shade of gigantic umbrellas, and never giving a thought to the dead whose image had been thus set among them?

However this might be, to speculate upon the thoughts of a statue had not been my object in getting down at the market-place. I had a very definite object in view, and one which I resolved to carry out at once. The fruit was both lovely and tempting, but, leaving it by, I went straight to the vegetables.

The fact is, I wanted to paint a picture of the Dutch school, with carrots, turnips, and a cabbage, all in a group. Those brought home by the cook, at my request, had all been failures in an artistic point of view; but now my only difficulty was the abundance and luxuriance of the subjects before me, of the cabbages, especially. At length I got one so large, so green, so round, so crisp, so beautiful, in short, that I had never seen its peer, save in my dreams during the last week. Having secured this prize, and turnips and carrots to match, I looked round in search of a carrier, and found myself face to face with my little viper-seller. Spite the prediction of Mr. de Lusignan, he had not turned up since the day of his unlucky fall in the gorges of Apremont, and I uttered an exclamation of glad surprise on seeing him as bronzed, as ragged, as wild, and evidently as well as ever.

"Well," I said, eagerly, "how are you? How did you get over that accident? Why did you never come to see me in Fontainebleau? And how is your little sister Belle?"

Of all my inquiries, this was the only one which my viper-seller answered.

"Belle is well," he said, in his brief way.

"And so are you," I remarked, glancing at his little brown feet, still stockingless, but cased in strong shoes. "You are not selling vipers in the market, are you?"

"No," he sententiously answered.

"Well, then, will you carry these for me?"

"Do you live far?" he inquired, dubiously.

"Not far—only Ruc Royale."

But he gave cabbage, turnips, and carrots a gloomy look, and said, briefly:

"You have no *hotte*."

He was turning away, as if, by having no *hotte*, I had necessarily forfeited all claims to his assistance, when the sunburnt woman sitting under a blue umbrella, with whom I had been dealing, exclaimed, indignantly:

"You little, lazy fellow, can you not carry these without a *hotte*?"

"No."

"Well, then, here is one," she continued, and, snatching up a dilapidated osier creel by her side, she tossed it to him, with a "Strap that on, do," full of righteous wrath.

He put on the *hotte* with a sullen look, while I thanked its owner, and promised that it should be returned to her next market-day. Then my purchases, to which I added another cabbage from gratitude, being stowed away, we walked off together. I tried to make my companion talk by the way, but he only trotted by my side, nibbling, like a young donkey, at the green, tufty foliage of the carrots which hung out over his shoulder, looking at me with his gypsy eyes, and evidently thinking that, if speech is silver, silence is golden. But I knew how to deal with him, and I bided my time.

The day was warm, and I felt hot and tired when we reached the house. It looked gray, cool, and quiet, as, coming out of the sunny *Rue des Orties*, I saw it through the iron grating of the stately old gate. I looked at it with a glad sense of rest. I felt that, if I were a stranger passing by, that arched gateway, with its rich garland of foliage softly waving in the breeze over the faded yellow stone, would charm me. I felt that, if I saw that old house built in the commonplace style of the last century, and half embosomed in a little wilderness of trees and flowers, I should like to make my abode in it—not forever, may be, but at least for a time—long enough to make me love its homely aspect, and to endear me to all its quaint old nooks and corners. But if there often is in life something chilling in the careless welcome of the friend we love, how much oftener do places and inanimate objects read us the hard lesson that we are alone! My ring at the gate—and it was loud and sonorous—was not answered; no face appeared at one of the windows, no white cap peeped out of an attic casement, no step and no voice came from one of the green alleys. I rang once, twice, then again and again, and still my summonses were unheeded. It was plain that the moment the master of the place had turned his back upon it, the house had been deserted, and that Harry's bilious attack had kept neither

Harry himself nor his mamma within. Here was poor little me locked out, with my viper-seller standing in the sun by my side, a creel full of vegetables on his back, and a philosophic indifference, which I vainly longed to emulate, on his brown face. My mind was full of perplexity. If it had not been for these unlucky vegetables, I might have gone back and taken refuge in the church of Fontainebleau; but I could not give up my cabbages, and I had not implicit faith in my companion. For suppose he should go off with these eatables, and be seen no more! Unconscious of my ungenerous suspicion, the lad relieved me from my difficulty by lifting the latch of the little postern-door—I had never thought of trying it—and letting himself in. I followed gladly, and put on the bolt at once. I thought to find no one within—nor did I. The house could not have been more completely deserted if Fontainebleau had been shaken by an earthquake, or threatened with an eruption from a volcano. I opened the dining-room door, and found, as I expected to find it, the room quite empty. While I did so, the boy, without saying a word, went straight to the kitchen. There was no hesitation about the act, no seeking right or left, and in a moment, with an intuition for which I could not account, I felt that the boy had been here before, and knew the house as well as I did. I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"You know the way to the kitchen," I said. "What brought you here?"

He looked me straight in the face.

"I came last year," he answered.

"I do not believe you," I retorted. "Tell me the truth."

"I came last year," he repeated. "I sold vipers to the baron."

Again I felt that he was deceiving me, but I felt also that I could never compel the young savage to tell me that which he was bent on concealing. So, without insisting, I simply bade him follow me up to my room with his burden. If I had consigned my vegetables to the kitchen, I should of course never have seen them again. When this was done, I put half a franc into his hand, and, opening a little casket of mine, I took from it a string of blue-glass beads, which I gave him, saying, "This is for Belle."

The blood rushed up to his swarthy face, and for a moment dyed it crimson; his eyes glittered, and his lips quivered as he took the beads from my hand, and looked at them. He was not civilized enough to thank me, but if the gladness caused by a gift can stand for gratitude to the donor, I had no cause to complain.

"You may go now," I said.

But he lingered, with the beads in his hand, looking at them, then at me, and seeming irresolute.

"I do not want you any longer," I resumed; and, opening the door, I showed him the way out.

He thrust the beads into his pocket and went out, but when he stood on the landing he paused, and, looking up at me, he said, mysteriously—

"You will not tell?"

"Not tell what?" I asked.

"You will not tell?" he resumed, impatiently, and with a half frown.

There was no making him explain his meaning more clearly, so, to get rid of him I said, hastily:

"No, no, I will not tell."

He nodded, and instead of going down he went straight to Elizabeth's door, opened it, and, disregarding my amazed looks, said:

"Look, there it is. I brought it a while ago."

I looked, but it was at him, for I really thought my viper-seller had gone mad. He was in the full possession of his senses, however, for on hearing a noise below—I had left the dining-room door open, and the wind now shut it with a loud bang—he slipped down the stairs like one of his own snakes, and vanished in a twinkling.

He was gone, and I stood on the threshold of the room of Elizabeth, and before me on her dressing-table I saw a little unframed picture, a cool and green bit of forest, with my viper-seller in the foreground, and, turning from him in dainty aversion and shuddering horror, the beautiful Elizabeth herself, so lovely and life-like that I knew her at a glance. Not in vain have the poets told us that love is blindfolded; but surely they should also tell us that the bandage over his eyes is of his own choosing. And Friendship, that twin-sister of Love, is not and will not be more clear-sighted than her brother. She too will not see the blemishes of the loved object; she too turns her head away from that trying contemplation, and does her best to be cheated to the end. But there are times when even will is powerless, when the bandage falls, and the unwilling eyes must see. I did not give the picture a second look; I closed the door of Mrs. Henry de Lusignan's room, and, unhappy to the very heart, I went away to the garden, and sitting down there I cried rather bitterly. I had tried not to see, not to understand, not to feel even that I was wronged by my friend—wronged in so far, at least, that I was rigidly excluded from

her confidence. But I could not so deceive myself now. It was plain that, besides that secret which my guardian had forced from her with so much trouble, there was another secret in the life of Elizabeth, a secret in the present as that had been in the past, and which she kept back from me as jealously as if I were her enemy. This it was that pained me, and I do not think unreasonably so. Mine was the old story of giving bread and getting a stone in return. It was a hard case, for, homely though the bread I gave might be, it was at least human food; it was made of true wheat, which the earth had nursed, which sun and rain had ripened into golden grain, and for which a pebble was a poor exchange. Spite the warning which I had received from Mademoiselle Aubrey, I had refused to accept this unpalatable truth, until it was fairly forced upon me.

And now what was I to do?—indeed, what could I do? Nothing. I had no right to upbraid Elizabeth; I had not even the right to pry into these matters, which she so evidently wished to keep from me; so, apart from my promise to the little viper-seller, who, in a fit of repentant gratitude, had shown me the picture on her table, my only course was to forget that her door had been opened that day, to ignore, as if I had never seen it, that little bit of forest green, with those two figures, which, though I had beheld them but one moment, haunted me irresistibly. The bold, ragged gypsy-boy, the beautiful lady, as beautiful as any princess in a fairy-tale.

But if will is strong, thought is stronger, and thought had it all her own way, till I remembered, as with a flash of light, that there was not a soul in that great house, and that the postern-door was not even bolted. I confess it to my shame, I forgot my wronged friendship in a moment, and, instead of boldly sallying forth to guard the citadel, I prudently retreated to the farthest recesses of the grounds, shrewdly concluding that no robber would seek for me there.

The afternoon was hot and still. The grass, the trees, the sky itself, glittered through a white haze. The birds were hushed; they kept hidden in their thick, dark foliage, and only a faint twitter now and then betrayed their existence. The very chirrup of the grasshopper sounded low and far away, and the drowsy hum of insects was enough to send one to sleep. But fear is the most wakeful of all feelings. My eyes were all vigilance, my ears all keen attention, till, to my infinite relief, I heard the loud, shrill laugh of Hermance, which acted on my terrors as cock-

crowding acts upon ghosts, and sent them troop-ing off so quickly that I almost questioned their existence.

The diversion they had created had done me good, however, and I could look at Elizabeth's actions from another point of view than that of injured friendship. After all, she had a right to have a lover, and keep the fact a secret, if such were her pleasure. If that young painter, who so kindly carried the little viper-seller on his back, and whom Mademoiselle Aubrey described as so handsome, if that Prince Caramalzaman was smitten with my princess, and if she liked to meet him at the Sanguinède, and to figure with ragged boys in his forest pictures, who could, or who should, say that it was wrong? Not I—surely I could only find fault with the secrecy; and even that might be prudence, with such a father-in-law as was Mr. de Lusignan. Even though she had so passionately loved her dead husband, Elizabeth might wish to marry again; and if so, she would naturally want to keep her child; and here it was easy for me to foresee that contention between her and Mr. de Lusignan was inevitable. And so, little by little, and from argument to argument, I went back to lenient views of my Elizabeth's conduct, and, of all the passions of grief I had indulged in, only a little soreness remained.

And now I began to wonder if she had not come in; and if so, what she would say, or, indeed, if she could say anything. I walked slowly back to the house. I heard the voices of the servants in the kitchen, but met no one. I went up-stairs, and knocked at the door of Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, and got no answer. So she had not returned. But, perhaps, she might be in the drawing-room. I went down and found it empty. Rather disconsolately, I sat down and looked about me. I felt very lonely, and was unreasonably depressed at my solitude.

The afternoon was now well worn; I had spent a long time in the garden, and streaks of gold from the west stole in on the polished floor through the slit of the yellow curtains, which had been drawn to keep out light and heat. The room felt deliciously cool, and a large vase full of wild-flowers, and grasses and ferns, on the white-marble mantel-piece, gave it a sweet forest fragrance. I had brought in these flowers to Elizabeth, and she had arranged them, with that graceful taste which she carried in all she did, and which was her one artistic gift. The silence, the freshness, and the subdued golden light, all soothed me; besides, it so happened that my chair, a most delightful cane arm-chair, faced the

Watteau, and that I could look at it and enjoy it at my ease. I cannot say how long my contemplation lasted. I believe the room, though cool, was rather close. Perhaps, too, there was something mesmeric in the eyes of these fair shepherdesses, as they looked down at me in my arm-chair from their perennial bowers. All I know is, that I fell fast asleep.

When I woke the yellow sunlight was all gone, and a wax-light was burning on the marble mantel-piece at the other end of the room. My first consciousness was, that I was no longer alone. My second thought was, that I had never seen a man so handsome as he who now stood before me, looking at the Watteau. My chair was in a dark corner, in the deep shadow of the tall window-curtain. It was plain that he had not seen me, and was unaware of my presence; if I kept very still, he would remain so till he went away. I did not feel in the least afraid of him—perhaps because I heard Watkins talking to Harry on the terrace; perhaps, too, because he was so very handsome. His contemplation of the Watteau was a long one, and I had time to look at him. He was young, tall, and finely-proportioned, and, as I said, remarkably handsome.

My head was very full of classical nonsense in those days, so when I saw those golden curls, and that beautiful though haughty Greek face, flashing before me on the gloomy background of the darkening room, I thought at once of Pythian Apollo, not of that Apollo, the god of song, who sports on Mount Parnassus, but of that keen hunter, with the unerring arrows and sounding silver bow, who runs down the wild-boar in the forests of Thrace.

Thought is swift, but scarcely had these thoughts time to pass through me, when my young heathen god's blue eyes suddenly left the picture, and fell down upon me.

"By Jove!" he cried, in his surprise, "there is some one here."

I remembered his voice at once; it was that of the painter whom I had overheard talking to Elizabeth at the Sanguinède. He seized the wax-light to inspect me, no doubt, but at that moment the door opened, and Elizabeth came in.

"Well, Mr. George," she said, in her gayest tones, "what do you mean by all this? Are we playing at hide-and-seek? What brings you here, when you should be at the Sanguinède?"

I suppose she read a warning in his face, for she ceased abruptly. I rose quietly, and left the room. Our eyes met, as I passed her, but that was all—we neither of us said one word.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELIZABETH was very pleasant and wholly unembarrassed, and I was wretchedly confused and ill at ease, when we met at dinner half an hour later. She rallied me agreeably on my sudden return, and even joked about my nap in the drawing-room, but did not seem to think it needful to allude to the handsome stranger whom I had seen there. Perhaps it was my part to solicit, and not hers to volunteer an explanation; perhaps my silence was more significant than discreet, but I had all the awkwardness of an inexperienced girl about me still. There was all the passion in me that can make one plunge headlong into a stormy current. I could have upbraided Elizabeth, and never faltered, but I could not skirt perilous shores, and yet guide my little skiff clear of ill-breeding or blame. So I ignored Mr. George utterly, and Elizabeth, like a thorough woman of the world, as she was, though so young, took my silence with that mixture of ease and dignity which is the *ne plus ultra* of social teaching.

She was as fresh as a daisy, and as blithe as a bird, the next morning. Dropping all pretence of Harry's biliousness, she suggested a drive in the forest after breakfast. I could not resist the temptation; the day was fresh and lovely, and the forest was to me what it may have been to knights in the olden time, a cool and green mystery, ever lovely, ever new.

"Where shall we go?" I cried, jumping up, already all eagerness to be gone.

"Oh, let it be no set thing," she answered, gayly; "let us go a little bit everywhere."

And we did go a little bit everywhere. We saw rocky solitudes, which tourists rarely visit; we went through long forest-glades—so long that the little glimpse of light at the end seemed miles and miles off, and so lonely that whenever a squirrel nestled in the boughs above us, whenever a stag tossed his stately head far away, I uttered exclamations of fear that amused Elizabeth, for she was brave to imprudence, and if there had been danger—which there luckily was not—would have enjoyed it for its own sake.

At length we came to a thoroughfare where many roads met, and in the centre of which stood a stone cross. It rose in the sunshine, old and gray, a memorial of the past, and all its faded glories. For this was the spot where generation after generation had met

"To hunt the deer with hound and horn."

I dare say that each, when it thought of its predecessor, had that curious feeling which came

to me then, which we all have known, which our successors will know when we are gone, which is so pithily summed up in the French saying: "*Le roi est mort—vive le roi!*" "They are dead," said they, "but I am living. They have gone down to the darkness of earth, or to the chill of church-vaults, and I breathe this delicious air, I feel this warm sun, I ride over this green sod, under the shade of stately beech and oak; they are vanquished, but, till my hour comes, I am victorious!"

That sense of triumph is one of the strongest in our nature. When a man dies he becomes "poor Mr. So-and-so" directly, for life is the great wealth of the sons of Adam. What avails it that, two thousand years ago, Horace told, in melodious verse, the beauty of life, and life's joys? He would not have written poetry if life had been so poor a concern as he says. Granted that we must go; we are not gone, we are only going, and though there may be no pleasant lingering on the threshold of the two worlds, life, with health and strength, and the eternal beauty of Nature around it, is a noble gift, a grand possession, making kings and emperors of us all.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Elizabeth, who was watching me anxiously.

"Well, I was thinking of all the dead people who once came here," I replied.

"Were you? Don't you know that the whole world is a graveyard? Shall we get down here?"

And, without waiting for my answer, she alighted, bidding Watkins stay in the carriage with the child, who had fallen asleep on her lap. I followed her, admiring her graceful though stately carriage, as she walked along the grassy edge of the road. I could see the smooth oval of her rosy cheek, the rich plaits of her brown hair, twisted under her little black hat, leaving her handsome neck free; then the long lines of her white burnous, and trailing black dress sweeping the grass; and I thought what a noble-looking creature she was—how fair, how free! She walked on, without even looking to see if I followed; then, suddenly striking into a path on her left, she entered one of those narrow avenues, cool and shady, which abound in that grand old forest, and which are so lovely. Before we had walked ten steps I knew why we had come here. Mr. George sat painting in a grassy hollow, surrounded with tall trees, above which there was an uneven patch of clear blue sky, that seemed strangely far away from this lovely solitude.

The spot was one of the most beautiful forest-nooks that I ever saw. The trees that grew around it were chiefly beeches, with which pines

mingled their sombre green and slender stems here and there. They rose in tiers on the slope of ground around the little hollows, bending forward slightly, and spreading their graceful, drooping boughs, as if to enclose it jealously, and keep it forever from the world, and all its soil and stain. In their sheltering shadow grew ferns so tall and luxuriant that I could have hidden among them, and everywhere tangled grasses and straggling underwood, flinging itself in careless grace among the trunks of the tall trees, seemed to forbid even the wild things of the forest to come here and desecrate a place so tranquil and so fair. It was a spot which would have seemed to me like a glimpse of paradise, in its calm, dreamy beauty, but for a prostrate tree in the foreground. What thunder from the sky, what southwestern wind, what woodman's axe had felled it, that it lay there, its gnarled roots all bare, its trunk all torn, its boughs sere and red, as if withered by autumn blasts? That tree broke the Eden-like charm of the spot. Trees never died, never perished, never decayed in Eden, but lived on in immortal beauty.

Elizabeth, who had been here before, did not look around her, but, going straight up to Mr. George, she said, gayly:

"Well, and how are you getting on?"

He turned round hastily, and I saw his handsome face flush and his blue eyes kindle with pleasure as he rose to greet her. Little as I knew of these things, his face told me as plainly as a book the story of his love. It was written there in characters so legible and so clear that a child could have deciphered them. He bowed to me, but he could scarcely take his eyes from the beautiful face that was all in all to him.

"Oh! dear, how close it is here!" said Elizabeth, sitting down on the fallen tree. "What made you come to this horrid little hole of a place; and, Mr. George, why did you not put this old tree in? It is brown, and would really have given a little variety to that spinach-green."

He reddened; to color easily seemed one of his characteristics, but if he was hurt he did not show it; it was with perfect good-humor that he answered:

"I thought that this old tree spoiled the character of the place, and so turned my back to it." Then, seeing me looking at the canvas on his easel, he suddenly addressed me: "What do you think? Should the old tree have been in?"

"No," I answered.

"No—why so?"

He spoke so eagerly, with such kindling eyes,

and seemed so anxious for my answer, that I could not help being amused. There was evidently great freshness and inexperience of worldly life in this young man, but mingled with nothing that was either ungentle or uncouth.

"There are no fallen trees in Arcadia," I said.

"Arcadia!" he repeated, quickly, "where's that?"

He looked at me with genuine inquiry in his blue eyes. Benighted man, he had never heard of Arcadia!

"Oh! never mind," said Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, with a little touch of impatience, "what are your figures to be?"

"I shall have but one. A lady in a riding-habit, startled and alone. She is to be here, as you see."

"I see a very ugly blotch, but then you are a magician, and can alter all that, of course."

This Elizabeth said graciously, with one of her sweetest smiles, which, as I think, I remarked once were all sweet, because, spite her shortcomings, her nature was eminently good and gracious. His face lit with pleasure, but there was something else in his mind, for turning back to me he said, rather earnestly:

"I know what you meant about Arcadia. I remember Poussin's picture in the Louvre."

I remembered it too, but was rather surprised to learn that Mr. George took his knowledge of the very elements of mythology from pictures.

"Oh! never mind Arcadia!" exclaimed Elizabeth, looking provoked; "who wants to know any thing about it, poky old thing!"

But Mr. George, as if anxious to display the extent of his knowledge, resumed: "It was a favorite resort with Watteau, Lancret, and others, I believe. At least, I suppose that their dainty shepherds and shepherdesses must have lived in some such place."

When we have lived a little while, we know how to withhold such information as we possess, and not bestow it too generously on an ignorant world; but in youth we are not so wise, and think it a sort of duty to enlighten our neighbors. I here declare and protest that it was from pure generous zeal for his good, and not to display my own little learning, that I set Mr. George right.

"The Arcadia of Watteau is not the right one," I said, rather earnestly; "the shepherds of the real Arcadia were very warlike, and lived upon acorns—"

Here I stopped short, for Elizabeth laughed outright; and, though Mr. George remained quite grave, there was no mistaking the amused twinkle in his blue eyes. But, if book-knowledge was

not one of the gifts of this young man, natural courtesy of the finest quality never failed him, as I learned later. It had come to him like his bright locks and handsome Greek face, by right of birth, and was as inalienable an heirloom as either. Ignoring the interruption I had sustained, he said, simply:

"Of course that is not the Arcadia of Watteau. His shepherds and shepherdesses never lived upon acorns, but rather, I fancy, upon strawberries-and-cream."

"Oh! isn't that nice?" cried Elizabeth, with sparkling eyes. "Of course, you have not got any here," she added, a little crossly, and as if this were a great deficiency on his part. He replied, quite seriously, that he had not; and a conversation, half grave, half mirthful, followed between these two, for I remained quiet and rather sulky, feeling that I had been laughed at, and also somewhat vexed at having been cheated into coming. It is not all gain to be the sharer in a secret. I felt it now, and also that Elizabeth had been both considerate and kind in excluding me so long from all private knowledge of her concerns. How should I steer my bark between my guardian and his daughter-in-law—be true to one and not betray the other? The thought was so troublesome that I wisely bade it begone, and amused myself with listening to and watching Mr. George instead. One thing was clear to me that, if he was a most imperfectly educated young man, his ignorance appearing in almost every word he uttered, he was, nevertheless, wonderfully gifted. Nature had bestowed upon him a fluent tongue, and there were flashes of sudden eloquence in his language, which betrayed, I thought, his Celtic blood at every turn. It also seemed to me that he possessed an intellect both subtle and strong. Indeed, handsome though he was, the one fault of his face was too great an expanse of brow. That heathen Apollo, whom he reminded me of, never had so broad and full a forehead as this. Eloquence and song were as much a part of the god's divinity as his beauty and his strength. They were not, as in man, the development of certain faculties, and needed not to dwell in any unusual mould in order to become manifest.

"And where is Neptune?" suddenly said Elizabeth, looking round.

A cloud passed over Mr. George's face.

"Neptune is ill," he said.

"And you left him! Why did you leave him? You know very well the poor brute will fret for you."

He looked at her with wistful reproach. His eyes very plainly said: "*You ask me why I left*

him!" But Elizabeth did not seem to care for that language.

"Don't you think that is Harry crying?" she said to me. I started up to go and see, but she checked me. "No, please, I shall go," she said. "You need not come with me, Miss Carr," she added, a little formally. "I am coming back directly."

I did not much care to remain there with that strange Mr. George, of whom I knew nothing; but I did not like, either, to betray the feeling, so I let Elizabeth go alone, and sat down again on the decaying trunk of the fallen tree, looking after her graceful figure as it disappeared in the green gloom of the forest.

Mr. George spoke first.

"I believe, Miss Carr," he said, "that you are related to a dear friend and cousin of mine, James Carr?"

"We are cousins," I answered.

"So he told me when we met a year ago. Have you heard from him lately?"

"He wrote to me a week back."

"And was he well then?"

"Oh! quite well, thank you."

My replies were not encouraging, no doubt, and perhaps, though I did not intend it, my manner was not gracious, for here the conversation dropped, and we said not another word till the return of Elizabeth. Mr. George painted away, and seemed to have forgotten my existence; while, connecting his inquiries with various points of resemblance between the man before me and another man whom James had often mentioned of late, I came to a pretty shrewd guess as to the identity of the two. I had time enough for conjecture, for it seemed to me that Elizabeth remained a very long time away. Perhaps, the perfect seclusion and stillness of this quiet spot, and the irresistible restraint of Mr. George's presence, made the time seem longer than it really was. At length, I could bear it no more, and was just rising to go and seek my friend, when Mr. George said quietly, "She is coming."

He knew it, though he had not looked round—though not a sound, to my ear at least, had betrayed her approach. But he was right; she was coming at last with the child in her arms.

When I saw the greeting between Harry and Mr. George, I could not help concluding that these two were old friends. The child screamed with delight, and leaped into the arms of the young man, who, immediately throwing by his palette and brushes, became this young despot's slave. A little brown squirrel was running up a

tree, and leaping from branch to branch, and nothing would do Master Harry but to pursue it in its flight, seated on the shoulder and upheld by the strong arm of Mr. George.

"Dis way!" he cried. "Dat way, George! Oh! do ma' haste, George!"

And George, all obedience, plunged into the forest, in order to hunt the squirrel, and in a twinkling the two had vanished. Elizabeth laughed gayly, and looked after them with happy eyes.

"O Bessie," she said, and her lip quivered a little with emotion, "I cannot tell you how good he is to my child."

"He looks good," I answered—"ingenuous and good—and very handsome," I added, smiling.

"When I first came to Barbison, my darling was ill," she resumed, without heeding me, "and he took a fancy to Neptune. Nothing would do for him but to ride Neptune. Would you believe that Mr. George gave up his work in the best hours of the day—and you know what that is to a painter—to make Neptune walk with my Harry on his back!"

"That was very good of him," I said, demurely. "But, please, Elizabeth, while Mr. George walked on one side of Neptune, did you walk on the other?"

"Of course I did," she answered, blushing a little. "But you are all wrong, Miss Bessie, if you think it was done for my sake; for at first it was Watkins who was Harry's companion, and Mr. George did it all the same. He has the best and the most tender heart in the world."

I suppose I was in a mood to tease, for I remarked:

"Let us say, please, he has the best and most tender heart man ever had."

A change, full of passion and woe, appeared on her face, which suddenly grew deadly pale.

"Why do you say that?" she cried. "You know, you must know, there is not, there never can be, one like the dead to me! Oh! my lost darling!—my husband!—my husband!"

Sobs checked her. I was too much dismayed to stir or utter a word; but she recovered as quickly as she had given way. She bit her lip, she rose, she looked at Mr. George's picture on its easel, she came back to me, and, drawing out her watch, she said, almost calmly:

"It is quite late—I wish he would bring back the child."

Almost as she spoke the words, we heard Harry's voice prattling in his childish way, and lamenting that "de quirel" was gone. Indeed, he was rather querulous, not to say snappish, on

the subject of the squirrel's unkind flight, and his mamma had to take him in her arms, and soothe and comfort him with many soft, endearing words. As she did so, I saw Mr. George look at her attentively, and, in the changes of his bright, young face, I read all that he saw in hers. Surprise, mortification, and pain, were expressed by his countenance. He saw that she had been weeping, and he knew why and for whom her tears had flowed; his features quivered; he set his teeth; then he gnawed the fair mustache which shaded his upper lip, and, with a frown, he snatched up his brushes and painted away with singular energy. I was not sure that he was angry, but I saw very well that he was jealous. I remembered James Carr, and felt half frightened. So, when Elizabeth walked away a few steps to help Harry to look for "anoder quirel," I went up to Mr. George, and began praising his picture.

"These ferns are wonderfully true to Nature," I remarked.

He turned round in smiling acknowledgment of my praise, but he shook his head.

"Nothing is true to Nature when we look at her well," he said, with a half-sigh; then he suddenly added, in a low tone: "She had been crying, had she not?"

"It was my fault," I answered, deprecatingly—"I—I mean that I said something—"

"Yes, yes, I know," he interrupted, a little hurriedly—"it has happened to me, too. With a word I have brought up the past; and, you see, some women can forget—but she cannot—she cannot."

He did not want to accuse her, that was plain, but he gnawed his mustache again, and it was plain, too, that he suffered. Elizabeth was just then plucking some of the tall ferns, and giving them to Harry—she was too far away to hear us. Mr. George looked at her, then at me.

"Did you know him?" he asked, quickly. "What was he like?"

His suffering was so genuine and so keen, that I forgot how indiscreet was this inquiry from him to me, a stranger—the friend of Elizabeth! But the courtesy of Mr. George, to which I have already alluded, was that of a gentle and refined nature, not that of a man of the world. He could not have hurt the feelings of a child; but, when his heart was touched, he was too unsophisticated not to question, and too sincere not to use the plainest and most direct words in which a question can be put. My answer was as plain as his own speech:

"I never saw him."

"You do not know if he was like his cousin?"

"I believe there was not much likeness between them."

"Because I knew him—the cousin, I mean."

"We must really go," here said Elizabeth, coming back to us. "Harry will never forget that squirrel till we are out of the forest."

We left at once, and the drive home seemed to put the squirrel out of Harry's thoughts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE are quick to see that which we apprehend, so, even before we alighted at the gate of the Fair Gabrielle, I perceived my guardian seated by the gardener's ivied lodge, and evidently, as it seemed to me, watching there for our return. He threw away his cigar, and raised his hat courteously to us in smiling welcome.

"And how are you both, *belles dames*?" he cried, cheerily; "and how is my little Harry?—no longer bilious, I hope? What, fast asleep! Oh! the little monkey is all right, then.—Mademoiselle Aubrey, Mignonne?—she is well, I trust—spending the day with her friend in Versailles, and will not come home till late this evening. For my part, I could stand the heat of Paris no longer, so rushed back to my beloved *penates* with feelings of infinite relief. I wish you knew Latin, Mignonne, or that I could make a heathen of you, and then you would believe me when I told you that, as our railway-carriage rushed through the forest, I saw Pan, and all his Fauns and Dryads, peeping at us from behind the trees."

Now, one thing I had learned by experience, and it was that, when my guardian was very loquacious, the person whom he addressed bore to that flow of words the same relation that a fly bears to the web in which the cunning spider means to catch it. His object in being so mythological this afternoon was evidently to keep me below while Elizabeth went slowly up-stairs with Watkins and the sleeping child.

That object was accomplished. With a feeling of despair I saw them go, and felt surrendered to my fate; but, like a drowning wretch, I tried to put off the evil hour so long as I could by catching at straws.

"I could not believe you, sir," I said, "even if I were a heathen; for the great Pan is dead, you know."

"My goodness! How do *you* know that?"

"I have read it in Mrs. Hemans, sir. And then I have seen a picture in which a railway-line

passes through a forest, and as they hear the noise, and see the smoke and steam, all the Fauns and Dryads run away, carrying off the little Fauns, some in their arms, others on their backs."

My guardian whistled.

"Il n'y a plus d'enfants," he said, with a melancholy shake of the head. "Well, I fear you are right, Mignonnè. Yes, the Fauns are gone—gone forever, since the steam and din of railways crossed their sylvan solitude. Yes, on hearing and seeing the monster, the gentle creatures fled with many a wail and many a tender lament, and they shall be seen in our forests no more."

Now, Mr. de Lusignan was never so quick and keen a man of the world as when he talked poetry. I knew that the very thing I feared must be close at hand, and I stood prepared to meet the attack I could not shun.

"By-the-way, Mignonne, what do you think of Mr. Herbert, now that you have seen him?" he asked, with a smile.

I expected this; the name thus spoken was even no great surprise to me, yet I felt startled and confused, and would most assuredly have answered foolishly, if the silvery laugh of Elizabeth had not made us both turn round.

"Yes, do take Bessie's account of Mr. Herbert," she said, gayly. "Why, she was fast asleep in the drawing-room when he came to look at the Watteau."

"By candle-light, according to Hermance," said Mr. de Lusignan; "a strange time for an amateur painter to look at a picture. Well, and what did you think of him, Mignonne?" he added, turning back to me. But he spoke carelessly; all zest, all interest, seemed gone out of the inquiry.

"I left the room as soon as I could, and did not exchange a word with Mr. Herbert."

"No great loss, I fancy—but he is very handsome, to be sure. It is lucky, however, that he does not want to live by his pictures—they are awful trash!"

I was no great judge of art in those days, yet the picture, which I had seen that day on Mr. George's easel, had impressed me by its breadth of design and vigor of coloring no less than by its perfect originality. As my guardian spoke those rich, mysterious masses of bending trees, those gleams of sunlight on the grass, those cool ferns growing in the shade, which I had looked at with strange pleasure an hour ago, not merely in reality, but on the painter's canvas, all came back to me so vividly, that my involuntary denial was written in my face.

"You do not seem to agree with me, *Mignonne*?" said Mr. de Lusignan, bending his keen eyes full on mine—"have you seen Mr. Herbert's pictures?"

The tell-tale blood rushed up to my face, but again Elizabeth came to the rescue.

"Is there any picture of Mr. Herbert's here?" she asked, opening her blue eyes wide—"Oh! do let us see it, Mr. de Lusignan."

"No; there is none here that I know of," he answered; and, giving up the contest, he let us both enter the house, remaining without, and taking another cigar.

Elizabeth laughed a low, triumphant laugh, as we went up-stairs together.

"I should not care if he knew," she said, "but I do like to provoke him!"

But I, who could not get out of a difficulty like Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, was not thus easily satisfied. I was still in a flutter from my recent fright, and I followed her into her room to utter a few words of remonstrance:

"Oh! pray do tell him!" I entreated, as soon as the door was shut behind me; "it will spare so much trouble—pray do tell him!"

Elizabeth threw herself into an arm-chair before she answered me.

"Tell him what?" she asked, almost sharply.

I was at a loss.

"That you and Mr. Herbert are old friends," I said at length.

"But we are not old friends at all," she replied, almost crossly. "I was Mrs. Smith to him till the last fortnight, and I really know little or nothing of Mr. Herbert."

This was said almost haughtily, much in the tone of a queen who has but recently become aware of the individual existence of one of her subjects. My patience was somewhat tried, for I said, almost bluntly:

Mr. Herbert loves you, Elizabeth."

"Does he?" she answered, uplifting her eyebrows as if amazed.

"Does he?" I repeated, rather provoked; "surely, surely, you are engaged to him?"

Elizabeth fixed her blue eyes upon mine, and in a cold, hard voice she said:

"You are very good, Miss Carr."

"I do not ask for your confidence," I replied, a little impetuously. "I have no right to it; but one thing I do know, Elizabeth, and it is this: if you are, as I believe, engaged to Mr. Herbert, you ought not to hide it from Mr. de Lusignan—you ought to be above that."

"Thank you for the lesson," was her cool answer; "but why should I tell Mr. de Lusignan

any private concern of mine? Am I his daughter, his ward, or indeed any thing to him? He has chosen to take possession of me after a fashion, but must I be so simple as to surrender myself to his rule and governance? I should deserve any fate if I did so. *And I never will.* Besides, even if I were, as you fancy, engaged to Mr. Herbert, Mr. de Lusignan would be the last person I should tell. That man is a despot at heart, and his first act would be to rob me of my child, if he could. Have I forgotten how he treated his son and his nephew? and you want me with that lesson before me to seek such a yoke! O Bessie, Bessie! you were born to be ruled and mastered, but I was not. One bondage I have had—the happiest, but also the shortest, that ever made a woman blessed and wretched. But I will have none other; and, mind you, Bessie, if I were that young man's wife to-morrow, I should be as free as I am now."

Her lip curled as she said it. Whether Mr. George and Elizabeth were engaged or not, he was never to be her master. I felt silenced. Moreover, the arguments she had brought forward in her defence were such as I could not answer. After all, she had a right to her liberty, and I knew, to my cost, that my guardian was not the most generous of men. He had laid hard terms upon me and James Carr, and though poor James's unreasonable jealousy no longer made submission so bitter as it once had been, Mr. de Lusignan knew nothing about that. So I naturally veered round once more to Elizabeth, and was only troubled by the mystery which marked all her actions.

"Please don't tell me any thing," I observed. "I do not know how to keep a secret."

"My dear Bessie," she exclaimed, a little impatiently, "what secret is there to keep?"

"Well, but we met Mr. George to-day—"

"Oh! if you think yourself bound to tell every one of your actions to your guardian, I give you up," she retorted. "Tell him that—tell him any thing you like—but do not wonder that I tell you nothing."

I was so distressed at her tone that tears started to my eyes. She saw it, and her mood changed at once. She rose, and, coming up to me, she laid her two hands on my shoulders, and looked very kindly down in my face.

"Do not mind me, darling," she said, softly. "I am hard and bitter at times, but I know what a good little thing you are; only please never try to make peace between Mr. de Lusignan and me, because peace—real peace—is a thing impossible."

"O Elizabeth! I have only one trouble. How am I to keep your secrets?"

She laughed and turned away.

"I shall give you none to keep, you dear little goose," she said, gayly; "for, meeting Mr. Herbert to-day is not a secret, you know, though I really do not see the necessity of telling any one about it."

My powers of secret-keeping were most luckily not put to any severe test by Mr. de Lusignan. Whether he saw through me, and could desire no information from so feeble a creature, or whether his tactics had changed, he made no attempt, direct or indirect, to learn from me any thing Elizabeth might wish to conceal from him.

The next day brought back my dear Mademoiselle Aubrey, and with her, it seemed to me, came back security and peace. And yet, keensighted as ever, she saw that something ailed me.

"Something has happened since you and I parted, Mignonne," she said, giving me a wistful look. "You are not the same Mignonne that left us at the station of Fontainebleau. You need tell me nothing; I put no questions; besides, I can guess. But, take care, my dear, take care," she added, in her softest and kindest tones; "do not put needless burdens on your young shoulders. You will have plenty of your own yet."

I felt rather disconcerted, and wished to say something, but she checked me at once.

"My dear," she said, rather gravely, "did I not tell you that I put no questions?" And, changing the subject, she spoke pleasantly of her visit to her old friend.

I am not very familiar with the tactics of military commanders, still, something I have heard of the fashion after which famous generals carry on war. Dear Uncle John used to tell me of a great Roman whose plan was to wear out his enemy's patience. Every one knows that Bonaparte came down on his foe in masses, and the Indian system of stealthy surprise has found European imitators in plenty. But my guardian was too impatient himself to cast his chances of victory on the impatience of his antagonist, and he had not the coolness required to carry out the Bonaparte impetuosity. Moreover, though he was quick and keen, he was by no means cunning. I seldom knew him not to defeat his own schemes by some mistake or other. In the present contest between him and Elizabeth, his mode of action was both inconsistent and eager, for he seemed to have no other design than that of terrifying her, like that

bird which attempts to frighten its prey by a loud and sudden clapping of its wings.

Such a bird Mr. de Lusignan certainly seemed to me, when Elizabeth and I went down together to the drawing-room, a quarter of an hour before dinner, on the evening of his sister-in-law's return. Mademoiselle Aubrey was sitting in her chair, my guardian stood near her. To all appearance they were alone, and it was only when we had reached the middle of the room that, by a skilful and sudden stepping aside, Mr. de Lusignan revealed to us the handsome and stately person of Mr. Herbert. How he had managed to keep him half concealed behind a window-curtain, I know not, but that he had done it out of malice prepense I feel sure. The effect of his *coup de théâtre* was instantaneous. Self-possessed as she was, Elizabeth could not prevent her countenance from changing a little, and she darted a quick, reproachful look at the imprudent Mr. George, while I was thrown into a state of trepidation so visible that Mademoiselle Aubrey gave me a look between pity and amusement, a look that said very plainly, "Poor little simpleton!"

Luckily for me, my guardian did not care to honor me with his regards just then. His keen black eyes went from Elizabeth to Mr. Herbert, and if one face told him little beyond surprise, the other spoke but too frankly. Mr. George's blue eyes danced with delight. It was plain that this net need never be spread in vain for him. The bait of looking freely at the fair face of his Elizabeth across Mr. de Lusignan's dinner-table was one which this fond lover's wisdom and fortitude never could resist.

"I believe, my dear Elizabeth, that Mr. Herbert and you have met before," insidiously began Mr. de Lusignan.

"Mr. Herbert and I are old friends," promptly replied Elizabeth, holding out her hand to the young man. "We were neighbors in Barbison, and his kindness to my little Harry I never can forget.—How is Neptune? Well again? I am so glad. And I hope your beautiful picture is getting on, Mr. George—I beg your pardon, Mr. Herbert, I mean, but I really did think your name was George for a time. Why did they call you George, I wonder? Is it your Christian name?"

She was seated now, and, leaning back in her chair, put the inquiry with a most artless look; but I knew she meant mischief, just as I felt sure that, by taking up the conversation, and keeping a hold of it, she meant to carry on the war after her own fashion, and not according to my

guardian's plan, if it so be that he had any. When she thus asked Mr. Herbert if his Christian name was George, the young man blushed like a girl, and replied, with evident embarrassment:

"No, my name is Eugene; George is a nickname I got at Barbison."

"Dear me!" continued Elizabeth, raising her eyebrows, "what odd fancies painters have! Now, why should George be a nickname?"

"Perhaps Mr. Herbert's friends thought him like Saint George," suggested Mademoiselle Aubrey, bending her bright, keen look on the young man's handsome face.

"Yes, I believe that was it," he answered, carelessly; but he seemed annoyed, and he really was so. To be handsome, and to be admired for his beauty, was one of his troubles, as I learned later.

Elizabeth's frank confession of previous acquaintance with Mr. Herbert had seemed to disconcert Mr. de Lusignan completely; but the advantage he thus lost he fully regained at dinner, for most insidiously, yet most successfully, did he lead Mr. Herbert to display that one weak point of his armor—his ignorance.

He was deeply, lamentably ignorant—of a broad, genuine ignorance which reached and comprehended all things that lie between ancient history and modern grammar. He spoke several languages, indeed, and spoke them all remarkably well, almost without the shadow of an accent; but he owed that to a refined ear and natural taste. His stock of such information as comes through study, was the poorest I have ever known in a man of his years, birth, and position; and yet, with that ignorance, he showed flashes of precious knowledge and natural talent, sudden, deep, and unexpected, like fragments of the purest gold shining in the worthless gravel in which they lie buried. He had read a good deal, and seen much, and his intellect was as vigorous and keen as his memory was retentive. Culture was all which that rich soil needed, but, alas! it needed it sadly.

Ancient history was no more his *forte* than ancient mythology, and he knew as little of bygone men and women as of Arcadia. I believe my guardian must already have been aware of this particular fact, for I never knew him to be so perversely classical and quotatory as he was during dinner-time this evening; and, to render matters worse, knowing, I suppose, how weak were my powers of defence, he managed to make me his most unwilling accomplice.

"The worst of Fontainebleau," he gravely remarked, as he helped me to some fish, "is, that

turbot is scarce and by no means good in it. I do not fancy that Domitian would have cared to live here."

"Was he so fond of turbot?" innocently asked Mr. Herbert.

"Very much so—convened the senate to discuss a sauce.—Was that the story, Mignonne?—you have all those things at your finger-ends, I know."

"Indeed, sir, I know nothing about Domitian," I replied, rather shortly; while Mr. Herbert, by whom I was seated, looked disappointed. I suppose he would have liked to know more about Domitian and his turbot.

"Ah! to be sure," resumed the tiresome man (my guardian, of course), "you do not care about emperors. You are all for heroes and Plutarch."

"Plutarch!—who's that?" asked Mr. Herbert, addressing me. Then, seeing that I did not answer, he added, composedly, "One of those Greek fellows, I suppose?"

"Yes," sarcastically said my guardian—"one of those Greek fellows, as you say, Mr. Herbert. Bessie can tell you all about him.—He played his part in our first conversation, did he not, Mignonne?"

I remembered my guardian's story of the fair Stratonicæ, and his application of it to myself and James Carr, and I reddened so much that Mr. Herbert looked at me in some surprise, and dear mademoiselle kindly turned the conversation.

"You have been a great traveller, Mr. Herbert," she said, addressing him.

"I have been a wanderer."

"And did you never miss home?"

"Home is not a spot," he replied quickly—"it is a circle. Once that is broken, home is gone."

"A nice little bit of paradox, Mr. Herbert," ironically said Mr. de Lusignan. "Does your philosophy incline toward paradox, eccentricity, and all that?"

"I think that eccentricity is the badge of the human being," coolly answered Mr. Herbert. "Who ever heard of an eccentric horse, for instance—vicious, yes; but eccentric, never."

"Is that an Eastern saying?" very impertinently inquired my guardian. "You have been so much in the East that one is always tempted to refer any remarks you make to that source. Mr. Herbert, I believe you are very familiar with the Koran?"

"I know something of it," replied Mr. Herbert, smiling with perfect good-humor; "and I also like Eastern sayings. A nation is known by its proverbs. 'Save me from my friends,' says

the Englishman; no doubt with reason. 'Be like the tree, that denies its shadow to none,' says the courteous and hospitable Arab; 'not even to the wood-cutter that is to fell it.'"

If Mr. Herbert intended a gentle reproof to his uncourteous host, it was not successful.

Elizabeth laughed with open disdain.

"What simpletons these Arabs must be!" she said, with a curl of her rosy lip.

"Why, yes, I agree with you there, my dear," put in Mr. de Lusignan, very paternal and amiable; "for, you see, the tree is hospitable, because it cannot help itself. It has not the power to crush the wood-cutter, or perhaps it would."

"How can you tell it has not the power?" asked Elizabeth, sharply.

The war was now being removed from Mr. Herbert's territory to that of his fair mistress; but the exchange did not suit my guardian. He would not take up the challenge; and he so dexterously managed the conversation that, before five minutes were over, he was down on Mr. Herbert again.

"This Fontainebleau is a poor place," he remarked, carelessly—"poor in all save grapes; has not produced one man of note—not even a poet.—By-the-way, Mr. Herbert, can you tell me which of the Plinies it was who made that curious remark about the poets?"

"What remark?" asked Mr. Herbert.

"I do not remember the exact words, but I believe one of these gentlemen congratulated himself on the fact that the year had been fertile in poets, from which I concluded that poets then grew like turnips, and were as useful. Which of the two said that, I wonder? Do you know? Was it the uncle or the nephew? Pliny the elder, or Pliny the younger?"

Mr. Herbert laughed a gay, careless laugh. It seemed to me that he wore a shield of pride, and that Mr. de Lusignan's arrows fell blunted against it at his feet.

"Pliny the elder, or Pliny the younger, are all one to me," he answered, composedly. "I am no scholar, as you know, I dare say, Mr. de Lusignan; but I have read Burns, and 'a man's a man for a' that.' As to the meaning of that good gentleman, it is plain enough, I think. I takes more time to write bad verses than bad prose, so he thought we have had a dozen poets—that is a calamity, to be sure; but we have escaped thirty-six authors. What a blessing!"

Elizabeth, who had been on thorns all this time, now brightened up, and said impetuously:

"I hate poetry." No knight ever charged in full tilt with more vehemence than she uttered

the words. Poetry, I fancy, meant my guardian just then. Yet I could not help being shocked; and Mr. Herbert gave her a reproachful look, that seemed to say: "Oh! how can you, that are poetry made visible—how can you speak so?"

"Poetry or poets?" suggested my guardian, coolly.

"I never knew any poets."

"Ah! that accounts for it," he said, with a smile so significant that she retorted at once, in her fearless way:

"No, it does not. I always liked painting and painters."

"Even before you went to Barbison?"

"Both before and after."

They exchanged looks of smiling defiance across the table.

"And yet," good-humoredly said my guardian, "your love for painting is purely platonic, Elizabeth. You are not like Bessie, there, who is wretched when she has not got a pencil or a brush in her hand.—By-the-way, Mignonne, you must show your sketch-book to Mr. Herbert by-and-by."

I was horrified at the suggestion, and resolved to evade it by every means in my power. I took this, moreover, for one of my guardian's stray arrows, but I was mistaken; it was well aimed, and sped with a purpose.

When we left the gentlemen to their wine, Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had been very quiet and observant during dinner-time, went up to the drawing-room and remained there; but Elizabeth said she felt stifled, and lured me out with her to the grounds. She was very much flushed, and fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief in a quick, irritated way.

"How I detest that man!" she exclaimed, as soon as we were out of hearing. "It is so mean to ask a man to his table and compel him to display his ignorance. So ungentleman-like. And that Mr. George to be such a simpleton as not to see through it!"

"A simpleton!" I could not help murmuring; "Elizabeth, Mr. George is no simpleton."

"Yes, he is," she said, tartly. "What made him come?—what made him open his lips and show his awful ignorance? He can get on with artists, but with a man like that, a gentleman, a scholar, a man of the world, fastidious and accomplished—what figure does he cut?"

She spoke angrily, and her lips trembled with resentment.

"Nine men out of ten do not know more than he does," she resumed; "but, at least, they do not show it. I am ignorant enough, in all con-

science; but your Mr. de Lusignan could never play such tricks with me. I should soon make him give it up, I can tell you."

I laid my hand on her arm, and looked up in her face.

"Do you know, Elizabeth," I said, "that I think you are quite wrong about Mr. George?"

"I wish you would not call him Mr. George," she interrupted, impatiently; "give him his name—it is a good one, if he has nothing else."

"Do tell me, Elizabeth, why he is called Mr. George?"

"Why, because he is such a beauty that one of the painters in Barbison would sketch him as Saint George with the Dragon."

She laughed as she said it, and was once more quite good-humored.

"And why am I quite wrong about him?" she resumed.

"I really think he knows more than he shows, and I am quite sure that he saw through Mr. de Lusignan. Remember the look with which he said to him, 'A man's a man for a' that.'"

"Why does he let him have his way?" asked Elizabeth.

"Because he does not care."

She knit her smooth brows.

"But I care," she said, haughtily; and every thing in her expressed the thought her lips did not utter. "The man whom I honor with my regard must not be scorned or laughed at by other men."

I was sorry for Mr. George. I felt that his fate trembled in the balance; a few more such conversations as this between him and my guardian, and his doom was sealed. Elizabeth would not yield at once, if it were only out of obstinacy; but her lover would be cast out of her hands, and ultimately sent adrift. And that there should be the opportunity for more such conversations, and for such a result, my guardian had determined; for, when we returned to the drawing-room, I found, to my horror and dismay, that my sketch-book had been brought down for Mr. Herbert's inspection.

"There, Mignonne," cheerily said Mr. de Lusignan; "there is a feather in your cap. Mr. Herbert thinks you a young lady of such promise that he will kindly spare some of his valuable time to direct your infant steps in the fair path of art. So to-morrow, Mignonne, we are all off to La Tillaie, to draw trees and avenues. What do you say to that?"

What could I say? I could only stammer my thanks. Indeed, I should have been well pleased at this arrangement, but for the cloud which ob-

scured the fair face of Elizabeth as she heard it. But, if Mr. de Lusignan meant to vex her, she had her answer ready.

"La Tillaie!" she said, with a little yawn of weariness, "oh, that is so far away. You will not expect me to go, will you?"

"Oh, yes! we shall," responded poor Mr. Herbert, with imprudent eagerness.

"Then you shall be wofully disappointed," she retorted, with a cruel smile, "for to-morrow I go shopping in Fontainebleau."

I could not help entreating her to come with us, for Mr. George looked the picture of surprise and dismay; but, of course, I failed. Elizabeth had decreed that, in her presence, at least, the ignorance of her lover should not be displayed, and she was inexorable.

CHAPTER XIX.

How cool and fresh and green were the deep shadows under the old trees of La Tillaie that day! When we came to the tall oak which from its shape is called *Bouquet de l'Impératrice*, we found Mr. Herbert already there, with his dog Neptune by his side. He gave the carriage a rapid look; perhaps he had hoped that Elizabeth would relent, but was none the less courteous and kind to me because she had adhered to her resolve of shopping in Fontainebleau.

"Is Mr. de Lusignan gone shopping too?" he asked, with a smile, as he helped us to alight, for dear mademoiselle and I had come alone.

His tone was quite good-humored, but there was in his blue eyes a look of sudden shrewdness, which confirmed my saying to Elizabeth, "Mr. George is no simpleton." Mr. de Lusignan not having attained his object, had not cared to come, and Mr. Herbert knew why he stayed away.

"My brother-in-law will join us later," said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"Then some good fairy must tell him where we are," he replied, composedly. "I have found the very thing for you"—this was to me—"but the carriage cannot take us to it."

I was not sorry to thwart my perverse guardian, nor do I fancy that mademoiselle disliked it in her heart, for she said, quietly, we would trust Mr. de Lusignan to the fairy; and, sending our carriage away, we followed Mr. Herbert.

The day was hot, but the retreat to which he took us was both cool and green. We were sheltered under the most delightful shade—shade which scarcely a golden sunbeam could pierce,

and yet fresh breezes found us out, and fanned us pleasantly every now and then. Before us rose a low, mossy rock, tall bracken ferns climbed up other rocks behind it, and an old trunk, brown, torn, and rugged, stood in the foreground, stretching out its bare, leafless arms with a proud though desolate grace.

"Oh, how charming!" I cried, "and how easy! And how kind of you, Mr. Herbert, to find it out for me!"

"And how pleasantly I can read my book here!" said mademoiselle, trotting off to a green bank, rather far away from us, I thought. "You, being young, may not think so, Mr. Herbert, but there is nothing so delightful as to read novels in one's old age; for one's own novel being all over then, it gives one a most luxurious sense of repose to go through those fictitious joys and sorrows. It is as good as an easy-chair, which is saying much, is it not?"

Mr. Herbert laughed gayly.

"I never sat in an easy-chair in my life," he replied.

He looked indeed like one to whom every manly pursuit and exercise was more familiar than the luxuries of a drawing-room; and, also, it seemed to me, like one whose heart, still vigorous and fresh, had not yet wearied of either joy or sorrow. While I stroked the black head of Neptune, who had crouched down by me, I could not help looking at and admiring the dog's young master, as he stood talking to mademoiselle. He was very handsome; but I do not think I cared so much for his beauty. The thing I liked in him was that frank, ingenious manliness which shone in his blue eyes, which rang in his clear voice, which his whole aspect expressed so plainly, though so modestly, that I could not help wondering at Elizabeth. Surely, this was not a lover to be despised, and surely, too, not one to be ashamed of.

My drawing compelled me to sit rather far from mademoiselle, as I have said; and Mr. Herbert was quite aware of the fact, for when he joined me his first words were:

"So she would not come?"

"She had shopping to do," I answered, deprecatingly.

He shook his head, and gave me a look that said, "You do not believe that!" But his next remark was about my drawing. Before ten minutes were over I had found out that Mr. Herbert was a first-rate teacher. I had also come to the conclusion that the man who could explain his meaning in such clear, precise, and forcible language, must be a consummate master of his art.

"How long and how closely you must have studied painting!" I could not help remarking once.

"I have worked hard, and I have been at it two years," he answered.

"Only two years?"

"It does not seem much, to be sure; but, if a man turns his mind to one absorbing thing, all his powers go with him, as servants with their master."

He said it quietly, like one aware of his own strength; and, looking at his broad, clear brow, I thought that this young man's servants, as he called them, were both many and strong. But he also knew his deficiencies. I cannot say how or why it was that he opened his heart to me at once, but he did so. Perhaps, in his ingenuousness, he thought it impossible that Elizabeth should have withheld any thing from me; or, perhaps, as he told me later, "my listening face" led him on; but certain it is that, while mademoiselle sat reading her book out of ear-shot, he grew both confidential and candid.

"Shall I tell you why she did not come?" he suddenly asked, in a pause of the lesson, for a cuckoo was calling far away, and I had dropped my brush to listen. "Because she is ashamed of me," he continued, without waiting for my answer. "Do not attempt to deny it. I should not believe you. I saw it yesterday, and she is right—she is right. I am a man to be ashamed of by such a woman as she is."

His face was flushed with pain, and I was too much disconcerted to attempt an answer.

"You are very learned, I know," he resumed, after awhile.

"Oh! pray, do not think so," I interrupted. "It was to tease me Mr. de Lusignan spoke as he did yesterday evening."

"Oh! no, it was not to tease *you*," he said, with a smile so significant that it was plain he had read through my guardian's object. "But I do not go by him, when I say you are learned. I have another and a better authority—your cousin and mine, James Carr; he thinks highly of you, and can never weary of giving forth your praises."

"He likes me, and therefore overrates me," I said, hastily.

"And I am sure you know ever so many things," he persisted, "and are just the person to set me right. I have not lived in society, but I do know that I am an ignorant man, far inferior to other men of my years and birth. I will not stay at the foot of the ladder. No, not a day longer. Only, what I do learn, I must learn alone, for you see I am too old to go to Harrow

or Eton," he added, with a laugh. "But will can do much, and I want you to tell me where and with what to begin."

"Oh! Mr. Herbert," I replied, alarmed at the responsibility thus thrown upon me, "it will be very difficult for you to study alone."

"Will it?" he answered, with a smile.

"Oh! so difficult; and there are so many things to learn."

"Are there? Well, I know how to read and write, Miss Carr."

He spoke good-humoredly, yet I was half-afraid that I had offended him.

"Of course, that is a great deal," I said, encouragingly; "but, of course, too, a great deal more is wanting."

"Yes, I suppose so; but please do tell me what is wanting. It may help you if I tell you, in a few words, the life I have led since I was ten years old. I have travelled in the East, and in the South of Europe, and been something of an Arab. I have learned to shoot, to hunt, to ride, to swim, to fence, to bear fatigue, to sleep on the ground, and live on bread and water, if need be. I can speak the language of every country I have been in, and I can also read and write. So, now, with what am I to begin?"

"Grammar, I suppose," I said, a little desperately.

"And what next, please?"

"Well, history and geography, I should say."

Mr. Herbert looked a little impatient.

"What next, Miss Carr?"

"Well, Greek and Latin."

"I know modern Greek and Italian," he remarked musingly. "It cannot be much to learn the old languages."

I could not help thinking him dangerously confident, so I added, prudently:

"Young men of fortune learn a great many other things, Mr. Herbert—metaphysics, logic, mathematics, and so on."

He looked puzzled.

"You know these, of course?" he said.

"Oh, dear no!" I answered quickly.

Mr. Herbert looked both surprised and disappointed.

"Well, no matter," he remarked, after a pause, "I shall leave them for the end, and as for the other things, why, I suppose, six months will do."

"Six months is very little," I ventured to reply; "but I dare say that, at the end of a year, for instance, you will know a good deal—quite as much as I do, Mr. Herbert," I added with a smile.

"I should think so," he replied, so frankly that I was a little disconcerted. "Why, at the end of a year, I expect to know more than Mr. de Lusignan. I hope at least to have learned not to quote the two Plinies."

"Ah! I felt sure you had read them!" I exclaimed, recollecting a little gleam of consciousness which I had detected in Mr. Herbert's blue eyes.

"Not so; but years ago my dear mother and I spent some weeks in a country-house in Provence. There were several Spanish books in an old cupboard, which I soon found out. Among them was an odd volume—a translation, of course, of Pliny's epistles, and I remember the passage Mr. de Lusignan alluded to."

"Then you read Spanish?"

Yes, Mr. Herbert read Spanish, and Italian, and French, and German. I did not inquire about the Eastern languages, taking his knowledge of them for granted; and it was amazing to me, when I questioned him, how much he had read and how much he remembered. He might call Plutarch one of those Greek fellows, and know nothing of Domitian and his turbot, but he knew the grand old Spanish ballads by heart; he was familiar with the works of German poets, whose very names were unknown to me; and everywhere he seemed to have trod not the classical high-roads, but the shady by-paths of literature, picking up precious knowledge by the way—knowledge which seemed to me both wonderful and rare.

But, though he had read a good deal, the world had taught him far more than books—not that world which Mr. de Lusignan knew so well, the world of cities and well-dressed people, but the world of places grand or beautiful, the world of men and women of varied races and aspect. His mind bore the strong impress of this training; it was both fresh and shrewd, as that of the ignorant often is. He had neither ready-made ideas, nor ready-made opinions, those wonderful conveniences of modern conversation, at his command; but he could tell what he had seen in language both graphic and concise, and express his meaning with a simple force and directness to which I was not accustomed. I was charmed, dazzled, and perplexed. It was odd to find that, if Mr. Herbert did not know the grammar of his own language, and, though he spoke it correctly, did so through mere habit—it was odd, I say, to find that he was quite fluent and at home with Egyptian hieroglyphics. He laughed at my surprise, which I was foolish enough to show, and said, quietly:

"I have been in Egypt, you see."

He had been in Egypt. Happy man! he had seen the Pyramids—I then thought this the perfection of bliss—and many other things besides. Indeed his language was full of pictures, brilliant, wonderful, and impressive. When he spoke I saw the red deserts spreading far away, or the low Eastern cities, with here and there a palm-tree and a minaret rising on a sky bathed in sunset. He said a few words, and, as if by magic, they called up a vision of immovable Sphinxes, with their stone feet washed by the Nile, and the distant ruins of temples and palaces breaking the low line of Egyptian horizons. While I still felt the spell of this Oriental scenery, Mr. Herbert, unconscious of the sway he held over me, took me to a green Norman village, with its gray-stone church and its orchards of apple-trees, white with blossom, or suddenly transported me to Dutch cities, so clear, so fine, so dainty in their neatness, so rich and mellow of tint in their quaint brick houses, and canals, and old trees.

"Oh! Mr. Herbert!" I exclaimed, in my mingled amazement and rapture, "how many things you do know!"

A frown stole over his broad, clear, vigorous forehead.

"But not the right things," he said, briefly. "I know the geography of the lands through which I have travelled, but not geography; I know the Koran, but not grammar; I can paint a tree, but I never heard of Domitian. And so the man who asks me to dinner laughs at me; and the woman I hope to call my wife is ashamed of me."

And was Elizabeth to be his wife indeed? A thrill shot through me as I heard him, and with sudden warmth I exclaimed:

"No, she is not; besides, even if she were, you will make her proud of you yet, Mr. Herbert."

His hand was resting carelessly on the black head of Neptune, who lay quietly by his side; his eyes were fixed on the earth, and there was no smile on his face as he answered:

"Does Neptune care for what I know, or do not know? If she had been a peasant-girl, as barefooted as King Cophetua's beggar-maid, should I have liked her less than I do now? But she cannot help it; and, if her dead husband was at all like the Harry de Lusignan whom I knew, how can I blame her?"

"Did you know him much?" I asked, with sudden interest.

"Intimately; though not for long."

"What was he like, Mr. Herbert?"

"Like a hero. He had every gift. An intellectual, open countenance, a frank smile, a charming temper, a fine mind, and a brave heart. He was the only man who ever made me feel, 'I wish I were like him.'"

"And why should you not be like him?" I cried, with sudden warmth. "What is there to hinder it, Mr. Herbert?"

He smiled at my ardor, and, looking at me steadily, he replied:

"Because, if men like Mr. de Lusignan, clever, amusing, sarcastic, and worldly, grew on every hedge, men like his nephew, pure, high minded—"

A hand laid on his shoulder checked the rest. We turned round quickly. Mademoiselle stood behind us, and behind her again, a few paces further off, I saw my guardian's swarthy face. Had he heard us? I could not tell. But surely mademoiselle had heard and understood every word uttered in the praise of her darling, for her blue eyes were glistening, and her lips quivered.

"Why, Bessie, you have done nothing," said my guardian, glancing at my drawing. "What will Mr. Herbert do with so slow a pupil?"

"Miss Carr will work more to-morrow than to-day," answered the young man.

Mr. de Lusignan seemed charmed with this arrangement; but he was not so well pleased when my teacher declined coming back to Fontainebleau with us, but persisted in returning to Barbison. He walked part of the way with us, however, and mademoiselle, staying in the rear, said to me in a voice full of emotion:

"I know who he is now. When we were in Germany, Harry wrote to me, 'I should have been drowned the other day in the Serpentine, but for the handsomest young Greek hero you or any one ever saw.' This is he, Mignonne. I am sure of it now. When I saw my darling in England, my mind was so full of trouble that I forgot asking him who this Greek hero was. I am sure it was he, too, who wanted to join him in going out with O'Donnell, but who was rejected as being the only son of a widowed mother, for you know that all O'Donnell's men were unmarried, and most of them without home-ties. Oh! if he had gone!—if he had gone, young, strong, and brave as he is, he might have saved and brought me back my darling!"

Her voice was broken with sobs, her tears were flowing; she had forgotten my guardian, who luckily was far ahead and could not hear us.

"Oh! dear mademoiselle," I remonstrated, "how could Mr. Herbert, how could any one have saved him!"

She looked at me.

"The man who did what Mr. Herbert did for his dog would do much for a friend, Mignonne. He would give his life, his heart's-blood, if they were needed. But I am selfish. Why should he have died for my boy. I am very selfish. Only you see I would have done it so gladly, that I forget."

She was crying like a child, for her fresh, passionate heart, when it yielded to sorrow, yielded entirely. But she let me kiss and comfort her, and wipe away her tears; and, taking me in her arms, she said, tenderly and rather impetuously:

"You are a darling, and I wish—"

"What, mademoiselle?" I asked, for she paused.

"That you may be very happy," she said, more soberly; but I felt this was not what she had intended saying. We had now reached the spot where the carriage was waiting for us. We parted from Mr. Herbert, and, as he stood before us, raising his hat and displaying his handsome face and bright, golden curls, mademoiselle said, in a low tone.

"He is a Greek hero, Bessie."

I watched him walking along the cool, green avenue with his dog behind him, and, thinking of Elizabeth so stately, so fair, so queenlike, I set her in my mind by his side, and wondered if the world held another pair like this. My guardian said, coolly:

"Pity he is such a fool!"

"Is he a fool?" asked mademoiselle.

"I call a man a fool who does not know when he is laughed at," answered my guardian, leaning back in the carriage; "I was quizzing him all dinner-time yesterday, and he never found it out."

I do not know what gave me the audacity to reply:

"I am afraid he was quizzing you, sir."

Mr. de Lusignan gave a sudden start forward, and, bending his black eyes and thick brows upon me, he said, almost sharply

"How so, young lady?"

"Why, because he pretended not to know about the Plinies, and he did—I saw it at the time, and found it out to-day. I fancy," I added, with perfect coolness, and regardless of mademoiselle's uneasy look, "that he wanted to draw *you* out, sir."

The very audacity of this speech saved me. My guardian laughed and sank back lazily, nor condescended to utter another word. But he had reddened, and I saw—with infinite satisfaction—that the sting had gone home. I dare say he was

also shrewd enough to understand that, if Mr. Herbert had seen through and yet not resented his impertinence, it was because of the consciousness of superior strength which would have rendered Neptune calmly indifferent to the barking of a toy terrier. My guardian was a very clever man, but he was only clever. Now, Mr. Herbert was something more, and, I dare say, he knew it. I am quite sure that Elizabeth would have been highly displeased if her lover had availed himself of my guardian's invitation, and at the same time it was plain to me that she was disappointed because he had not done so. She was silent and rather sulky during dinner, and retired to her room when the meal was over, instead of walking in the garden with me, as had become her habit of late. She had a headache, she said, but I saw her reading by the window, and had no faith in her headache. Besides, I had a world of things to say to her, and I could not wait and bide my time, which, as the event proved, would have been the wisest course. I went up to her room, was bidden to come in, and, though not ardently welcomed, received graciously enough.

"I have come to see how your headache is, Elizabeth," I said, hypocritically.

"Oh! much better, thank you," she answered, more civilly than usual; "won't you sit down?"

I sat down, and rushed point-blank into my subject.

"I wish you had come, Elizabeth."

"And listen to Mr. Herbert giving you a drawing-lesson. How interesting!"

"Indeed, Elizabeth, we spoke of other things besides drawing. I am sure you have no idea what a remarkable man Mr. Herbert is!"

"Is he?"

"Indeed he is, and knows so many things! What do you think, now, of his being quite familiar with Egyptian hieroglyphics? An arm and hand mean the letter E, a lion is R or L, a flower is O, an owl is M; and, Elizabeth, a leg, only think! is B; as for A, that is an eagle."

"Please don't go through the alphabet," entreated Elizabeth. "If there be a thing I hate in this world," she added, plaintively, "it is the Nineveh marbles."

I could not help laughing at her grave tone, but I persisted, none the less.

"O Elizabeth! do believe me. That young man is as gifted as he is handsome, and, if you would only encourage him, even by a word, you could fire his ambition, and make him do wonders! Indeed, indeed you could!" She did not answer, but looked straight before her, away from me, down into the garden, where evening

was stealing quietly along the paths, her cloak of gray shadows around her. I could not see her face well, but, encouraged by her silence, and, anxious to forward Mr. Herbert's cause, I pursued :

"And only think, Elizabeth, it seems that he, Mr. Herbert, actually saved the life of Mr. de Lusignan's nephew."

"So he boasts of that!" she said, without looking round.

"Indeed, no. It is through mademoiselle I know it. But how he did love and admire him, Elizabeth! They were friends, great friends, and the two wanted to go with O'Donnell. Mademoiselle thinks he might have saved him if he had. Poor mademoiselle—how she cried! I think that Harry de Lusignan must have been a wonderful man, for every one to rave about him so; and, do you know, Elizabeth, that, if he had lived, Mr. Herbert's ambition could have been awakened, and, of course—"

I paused in sudden dismay, for Elizabeth, throwing up her hands above her head, sank back with a low moan in a half-swoon.

"Do not call—say nothing!" she gasped, as I bent over her ghastly face, on which the pale light of a rising moon now shone, making it look death-like; but I obeyed her. I said nothing. I brought her a little water, and, gradually, she revived.

"You will not tell them," she entreated, in a low tone. "I do so hate making a scene; and now, Bessie, will you leave me?—you can say my headache is very bad; that will do—but please say nothing else."

Her languid voice took tones of sudden eagerness as she spoke. Her eyes were turned on me with a half-startled, half-entreating look. I promised all she wished.

"I do so hate making a scene," she said again, as I left her.

CHAPTER XX.

"*LIFE is a desert, a perfect Sahara,*" my guardian used to say; "but there are little green bits in it, now and then, and some are very cool and green."

Life, you have been no desert to me, no sandy waste, nor yet, to speak truly, a garden of delights; but then I too have gone over—who has not?—some barren tracts of land, and in these I too found those green bits which are so lovely to the eye in a landscape, and so pleasant

to remember when we look back and see them in the by-gone years. Of all such, surely none ever were so fresh and green to me as the days which followed that day in La Tillaie.

Mr. Herbert seemed happy to teach me, and Mr. de Lusignan well pleased that I should be taught by him. So the lessons continued. At first I made great progress, for my master was one of those teachers before whose words the gates of knowledge fly open as if they were the gates of that Arab cave which obeyed the magic Sesame. To my great regret, no coaxing and no persuasion of mine could induce Elizabeth to be present so much as once during these delightful lessons, and reward poor Mr. Herbert for his trouble by her lovely presence and her smiles.

"Bessie, my dear," she candidly confessed, "it would bore me so much."

My guardian, too, who had just taken up a new hobby, and was carving and turning juniper-wood to his heart's content in an attic fitted up for that purpose, had no time to spare for me, and trusted me wholly to mademoiselle, with whom I drove out every day to meet Mr. Herbert in the forest.

If this was not a wise plan, nor yet a prudent one, I can say in my self-defence that no one uttered so much as a word of warning. Elizabeth—perhaps, because she did not care, or perhaps, too, because she was a proud woman—never even faintly showed annoyance or displeasure at the sudden and close intimacy between myself and her lover. To mademoiselle these daily meetings with Mr. Herbert were sweet as balm of Gilead; for, had he not known and admired her darling? and was he not ever willing to talk about him to her?—and so, perhaps, she forgot me. Mr. Herbert himself, though shrewd enough in many things, was also very simple and unworldly, and never gave the matter a thought; for, at first, what was I to him save the shadow of the presence of his Elizabeth, save a faint echo of her beloved voice?

My guardian, too—he who had so strong a right to speak—said nothing. He saw no harm, no danger of any kind. If, as I fear, he meant treason to us all, by encouraging this intimacy between his little foolish ward and the handsome young stranger, Heaven forgive him! Surely, never did evil seed fall in less likely soil to bear such fruit as he hoped to reap. I meant no wrong, and thought of none. I had a girl's philosophy of life, and this is intuitive, or derived from books. It does not rest, like man's, on broad, practical experience. Imagination is its basis, and, though this may be sound and

true, yet who shall stint the flight of that swift wanderer? Distance may make all the difference between truth and unreality. There are few things that are not possible, but, alas! of all that can be, how much is attainable? So far as my experience went, I believe I was shrewd enough; but, when that failed me, I was apt to lose my footing and never suspect it. Thus I committed some strange mistakes about this time—mistakes which made me very happy, and which I did not find out till it was too late. Much that was but too clear, I never saw, to my cost. I groped in the dark, and thought it was day. I meant no harm, and I did a world of mischief.

I then belonged to one of those two great classes of worshippers and worshipped into which this world is divided. Of course, I was a worshipper. Uncle John had had my first adoration, and his death had left a great void in my life and heart. Dear mademoiselle had come next, but inevitably her star had paled before that of Elizabeth. I loved her very much, but years made a great gap between us. She had gone down the hill I was still climbing, and I could not help turning toward the companion who was scarcely more than a few steps on before me; and now from her, dear as she was, I turned to another comrade, more patient, more gentle, and, in many respects, more congenial, who walked side by side with me. I do not think I was faithless; I do not think that I gave to one what the other had had; but the heart goes about seeking in youth—sometimes it seeks for a lifetime, and knows no rest till it has met that which it requires. For a time, at least, I had found a resting-place. Almost from the first day of our acquaintance, Mr. Herbert had seemed unable to keep a secret from me, and, without thinking of it, especially without intending it, I grew to be as open with him as he was with me. I had never been able to open my heart to James Carr as I opened it to this stranger. I could never tell my joys or troubles to Elizabeth herself as I told them to her lover, and I always felt that dear mademoiselle was too wise to be troubled with my nonsense. But Eugène, though I admired him very much, had something about him which precluded every feeling of awe. I could delight in his vigorous and original mind, and yet be amused by his simplicity. There was no superstitious fear in the worship I gave him; it flowed from my heart, and was both tender and free.

I have often wondered, on looking back over this time, at the rapid progress our intimacy made; for, after all, he was a young man, a very

young and handsome man, and I was barely eighteen. I was innocent and inexperienced, as the young should be, and I did not know myself why I was drawn to Eugène Herbert, but later I knew it well. That young man, so ardent and impetuous, whose beauty was made to subdue every heart; whom the servant-girls at Barbison quarrelled to wait upon, such reward were his smiles and kind looks held; that Pythian Apollo who could, had he so chosen, have shot such dangerous arrows, and abused so fearfully the gift of beauty, was pure and guileless as any maid.

He was, in truth, like one of the knights of old; like a Bayard, spotless and fearless, one near whom the shadow of an evil thought had never come.

Elizabeth would not come where her lover was, and, respecting her wishes, he rarely appeared in our house. I have learned since that they had private meetings, but I never suspected it at the time, and, in my innocence, I thought I was the great link between these two, and was glad to be so. I thought myself wonderfully useful to my two friends. Happy illusion of a young and honest heart, which helped to make that blissful time doubly blissful to me!

It is delightful to spend hours with Nature, and see her daily in all her varying aspects of cloud and sunshine, of storm or repose. These perpetual changes, which lend beauty to the commonest scenes, had a strange magic in the grand old forest of Fontainebleau, and lost none of their charm for being seen and felt in the pleasant company of Mr. Herbert and dear mademoiselle. Day after day we visited spots which to have seen once is a happy privilege; again and again we explored the rocky solitudes of Boulogny and Franchard, or lingered beneath the solemn shades of La Tillaie, and the Bas Bréau. We often rested in the cool *dormoir* of Lantara, or by the little fountain of Sanguinède, and I never wearied of them. Neither could I weary of telling Elizabeth how much I liked all this. I sometimes wonder now at the patience with which she listened to me, but it never occurred to me then that she might not care to hear about what was so pleasant to me.

At first I worked hard at my drawing, and, as I have already said, I made some progress; but, gradually, either my ardor grew less, or Mr. Herbert's zeal for teaching me slackened, for, though the days passed, and we met daily, the pages of my sketch-book remained blank. The truth was that, though Mr. Herbert came out to paint, and I to draw, we had little time to do so when we

met, so full were our thoughts of other things. At first the great, almost the only, theme of our discourse, was that Harry who had been so dear to mademoiselle. How fondly she would listen to his praises!—saying, while the tears slowly flowed down her cheeks:

“Oh! do go on; you make me so happy—so happy!”

He could not deny her. Even I felt eager to know more of that dead hero whose sun had set in Australian deserts; so painting and sketching were put by, as we sat in a knot and listened while Eugène Herbert spoke. Never was praise less stinted than that which then fell from his lips. Inexperienced as I was, I felt the charm of the nature which could yield admiration so generous as this; and, as I listened to him, I believed I learned to think less of the dead than of the living. The shroud of Harry de Lusignan closed again over him, and I only saw the frank, handsome face of Elizabeth's lover. But the time came when mademoiselle could bear this theme no longer. Her heart grew too full, grief prevailed, memory lost her charm, and Mr. Herbert spoke no more of his dead friend. As a matter of course, mademoiselle withdrew from our conversations, and returned to her book. The spot she chose to sit and read in was often so far from us that we were virtually alone, and I could gladden Mr. Herbert's heart by talking to him of his Elizabeth. He was full of questions, which I was ever ready to answer. How she had looked that day; how she was dressed; what she had said or done, were all delightful news, which he listened to with the keenest interest and joy, so evident that it did one good to see it. These were portions of his discourse which I invariably repeated to his fair mistress.

“Elizabeth, I told Mr. Herbert that you wore a rose in your hair this morning, and he looked charmed,” I said to her one day.

“Did he?” she replied, languidly, and, unconsciously perhaps, she yawned—a very pretty little yawn it was—which by no means spoiled the symmetry of her lovely mouth; but, nevertheless, it provoked me.

“O Elizabeth!” I said, reproachfully, “he loves you so!”

“Does he?” she said, ironically; “how good of him!” and she rose, and left me chagrined and disconcerted, but not cured.

How different was his temper!—so genial, so even, so happy; and then his gratitude to me was unbounded.

“What should I do without you?” he often said.

I seemed to be as needful to him as I was unnecessary to Elizabeth. But we could not talk of her forever. Even that fertile subject could be exhausted; and then, instead of listening, I questioned. I could not know too much of the man who was to be the husband of my friend. Mr. Herbert was quite open with me, partly because he liked me very much even then, partly because he had nothing to hide. I soon knew almost his whole life—not in regular narrative, for he had no story to tell, but in sketches and glimpses which passed before me in bright succession. Mr. Herbert was a wonderful talker in his way. I have already said that he had a rare power of describing places. I went all over Europe, and no small portion of the East, with him; and, as we thus travelled together, I now and then got into trouble with panthers, or Bedouin Arabs, or Greek brigands. It was only accidentally, however, that these little traits appeared in his narrative. Mr. Herbert was not merely a modest man, he had also that sort of careless bravery which forgets the dangers its owner has gone through. But my eager face often led him on when he could have been silent, and sometimes he would say, with a smile: “How you like all this, Miss Carr!” It was “Miss Carr” at first, then one day it was “Bessie,” and, though he corrected himself at once, that slip of the tongue was often repeated.

We became very intimate. I liked to hear him talk, not merely of his past life, but of that present, in which I took an interest so deep. What, with whom, and how far was he studying? But there Mr. Herbert parried my attacks both gayly and frankly. He would tell me nothing of the stages through which he meant to reach the goal of knowledge. Only one thing I ascertained: he worked alone, and had no master. This was a state of things I could not understand, and I argued with him about it rather earnestly on the day that we visited the rocks behind Fort l'Empereur. Mr. Herbert had shown us this spot the day before, and we had been so charmed with it that we had agreed to take our luncheon and spend the day in it; so the carriage that brought us had strict orders not to come and fetch us before five o'clock in the afternoon.

Memory is a treacherous companion. She often leaves us in the lurch when we need her most. Sometimes she ruthlessly blots out whole years from our brief span of life, and drops the days that were most blest, days precious as diamonds or orient pearls, down into the dark well of Time, there to sleep forever, till the great day of all waking. But often, too—how or why

we know not—she is strangely tenacious of the slightest things. Days and hours of which we took little note, that looked very like other days when they were passing, seem written in light on the pages of her book.

Such a day, keen and vivid, is this to me still. We left the carriage at the foot of the rocks on which Fort l'Empereur has been raised, and climbed a winding-path up to the spot we had chosen to spend the day in. This was a rude grotto, built of rocks, with a low stone seat all round, a stone table in the centre, and, beyond the narrow path in front of it, a delicious view of a green valley, full of trees and ferns, down which we could look as we sat. And here we found Mr. Herbert waiting for us, with a hamper—we were his guests—and with him an old friend, the little viper-seller, who had been gathering some dried sticks, and was kindling a fire of them in a corner.

"Ah!" cried mademoiselle, gayly, "you have kept your promise, Mr. Herbert, and brought this little gypsy—for I feel sure the lad has gypsy blood. And where are his vipers?"

"All sold, mademoiselle. Clovis—the name is Merovingian, not gypsy, as you see—has given up vipers, and under my guidance, taken to wood-carving, for which he seems to have a genius. He means to earn a good deal of money for Belle.—Do you not, Clovis?"

The boy looked up from his fire, and nodded gravely.

"And what is the fire for, Mr. Herbert?" I asked. "I hope you are going to treat us."

"It is only for tea, Miss Carr."

"And have you a kettle—a real kettle, Mr. Herbert?"

He had a real kettle, to my great joy, and he had other good things too. A roast fowl, a melon, a pastry, plums, and strawberries, and, of course, a bottle of champagne.

I could not help drinking the health of Elizabeth when my glass was full of the bright, sparkling wine. Mr. Herbert looked at me and smiled; and when, the meal being over, we wandered away together, leaving mademoiselle in as close converse with Clovis as the natural reserve of that young savage allowed, he said to me:

"How you do love her, Miss Carr!"

"Mademoiselle? Yes, I love her very much."

"And justly so. But I did not mean mademoiselle. I meant Mrs. Henry de Lusignan."

"Ah! yes, I love her with my whole heart."

"I know it. You may not be aware of it, but your face lights up when you speak of her. You become transfigured, and bright as day."

"Do I, Mr. Herbert? Then I know what to do when I want to brighten."

"No, that magic will not work when premeditated."

And so we jested as we walked among the rocks, looking down at the fresh green world below, till we drifted into other themes, and I again argued with Mr. Herbert about his studying alone.

"You will find it so much harder," said I, in my wisdom.

"I dare say you are right, Bessie—I beg your pardon, but the name (it is such a pretty one!) will come uppermost, but I cannot help it," was his reply. "Whether it is through having led such a lawless life, I cannot tell, but teaching does not answer for me. When I took to painting I tried a master, but it would not do. The only compromise I could admit of was to come to this colony of Barbison. From the intercourse of painters, from their experiences, from their faults and their merits, I learned ten times more than from any master."

"Well, then," I remonstrated, "why do you not seek the society of intellectual men, Mr. Herbert, and learn from them, if that be your system?"

"How do you know that I do not?" he asked, laughing.

"Oh! I beg your pardon; but I did not know—"

"My dear Miss Carr, you have no pardon to beg. You have been a perfect godsend to me. Twenty times a day you utter remarks, or make allusions, which show me that I am the most ignorant mortal this earth ever bore. What more do I want? I was late last Tuesday. You little suspect that talking of alchemy with you on Monday was the cause. I ran off to Paris on Tuesday morning by the first train, drove at once to the Imperial library, and knew as much of alchemy as you do, Miss Carr, by twelve o'clock. I have a good memory, so I suppose *that* is got rid of."

I was taken by surprise.

"But you do not know alchemy?" I cried.

He laughed frankly, and answered:

"Heaven forbid! But I have come to some original conclusions about alchemists. I really do think that many a one of these old gentlemen who wear such long beards, and such wonderful caps, found the Arcanum Magnum—I can quote Latin, too, you see—but that, having failed to find the fountain of youth, as well as the transmutation of base metals into pure gold, he let the grand secret perish, because the power to enjoy its fruits was forever wanting. Let others seek

and toil, let them waste youth and years in the vain pursuit, what is it to the wearied old man who sits on the threshold of knowledge, and has learned to his cost the vanity of such wisdom?"

I was silent a while; I was bewildered, and not quite edified. Was that how Mr. Herbert meant to study, by sudden and erratic flights, if I might so speak, into the world of knowledge? I could not help putting the question to him. He answered me frankly, and very good-humoredly:

"The traveller who has time to spare can say, I shall go here, then there; then, if I have forgotten any thing on the way, I shall visit it as I return. But I am not such a traveller. I must never come back along the road I am now following, so I stop at every town and village of note, and see it once for all. Besides, for set study, I have no time. Painting is there, and rules me. I have a little money left, but when that is out, painting must come to the rescue."

I looked amazed at this confession.

"Ah! then, you did not know," he said, carelessly. "True, plenty of people know that I was born rich; and there are not many who know that I am poor. But I am not afraid," he added, with a proud, confident laugh, "painting will be true to me."

I looked at him. We were walking side by side; his handsome face was slightly bent down toward me; the broad forehead, the strongly-marked though handsome eyebrows, and the brilliant, deep-set eyes, impressed me with their intellectual strength and power more than they had ever done before. I never knew a man so frank about his ignorance as Mr. Herbert; but neither did I ever meet one so confident of his own strength, so sure of ultimate success in whatever he undertook, as he was. Never for one moment did he doubt the possibility of victory. I felt silenced, and said no more; but I could not help commenting inwardly on this admission, which had dropped almost inadvertently from his lips—"I have a little money left." Open as he was, he had always been reticent in all that concerned his family history. He sometimes mentioned his mother, and always with tenderness and respect; but he never alluded to that ungovernable temper which had cost him his position in life, and estranged him from his kindred. He never even distantly reproached her for the selfish love which had reared him in the ignorance of all that a man should know. That she had led a life of incessant wandering, never staying any where for more than a few months—sometimes a few weeks—and that he had accompanied

her, I knew; but I did not know why it was that he had volunteered to go out with O'Donnell, though she was still living.

I felt that there must have been some sort of difference between his mother and himself, and that it had taken place not long before her death; but of what nature it had been I could not divine. Once before the conversation I have recorded here, he had casually mentioned a Miss Dunn, who had set me castle-building; for as we spoke of voices he had said of her: "Miss Dunn's voice is the most silvery I ever heard." But, when I looked up inquiringly from my drawing, he only added: "She was related to my mother's companion." Thus informing me, for the first time, that Mrs. Herbert had had a companion, but telling me no more. I would have given something to know what Miss Dunn was like—whether she was young, pretty, or fascinating; but Mr. Herbert never mentioned her again.

Now, what brought this Miss Dunn back to my mind, just after Mr. Herbert acknowledged to me that he required painting as a profession to live by? What, above all, after a long pause, during which we were walking back toward mademoiselle—she had been looking at us rather earnestly during this long conversation—what, I say, made me remark abruptly:

"How I should like to hear Miss Dunn's voice!"

"And what do you know about Miss Dunn's voice?" he asked, with a start of surprise; then, suddenly recollecting himself, he added: "Ah! to be sure—I remember telling you. Well, if you should hear it, I believe your judgment will confirm mine; it is exquisitely silvery."

I waited, expecting to hear more; but no more came, and I was not bold enough to put a direct question.

"Mr. Herbert," said mademoiselle as we approached her, "do you know that the boy is a genius? Why, he carves very prettily already. Look at this, Mignonne. Now, there is meaning in that dog's head—is there not? But then he is a Jack-of-all-trades. Vipers do not pay in winter, so he goes about scraping caterpillars' eggs off the trees, and gets nine sous—think of that!—for a measure. It may freeze or rain—he starts at five in the morning, with a piece of bread and a herring in his pocket. When he is hungry, he lights a fire in the forest, as he did just now to boil the water for our tea—it is beginning to sing, is it not?—and he toasts his herring, and, eating it, is happy. His philosophy is supreme. I was pitying him a while back,

but he would not be pitied. 'It would not do for Belle, you see,' he remarked confidentially, 'but it does for me. Uncle says one does not know what to do with girls, but as for men, why, the emperor always wants men to fight for him.' And so, having that prospect of fighting for the emperor some day as a door ever open to get out of his difficulties, Clovis is happy."

Mademoiselle had spoken in French, and Clovis had heard her with imperturbable gravity; and only once, when she mentioned Belle, he nodded as if to confirm her words.

We had tea after this; then we all climbed up to the Fort l'Empereur, to look at the grand view below it.

"Why, we are going to have a storm!" exclaimed mademoiselle, as we reached the platform.

And truly a thunder-cloud, which had been creeping up the sky, was now looming above us, black as ink. Its vast shadow was already cast over the landscape beneath, struggling there with the fiery rays of a lurid sun. The sight was one of the grandest I ever saw, and nearly took away my breath with mingled admiration and awe.

"You are afraid of thunder?" asked Mr. Herbert.

"Yes; but this is very fine," I answered.

"Fine or not," decisively said mademoiselle, 'we must not stand here to be made lightning-conductors of, so please let us go back to our grotto; it may not be safe, but it is safer than this open turret.'

We obeyed this wise counsel, but long before we had reached our place of refuge a white flashing streak of lightning had darted across the sky; closely followed by a thunder-peal that seemed to leap from rock to rock, so rapid were its echoes.

As we reached the grotto, where Clovis sat in philosophic indifference, the white rain began to fall in torrents, half hiding the green valley below. Another lightning-flash, another peal of thunder, loud, deep, and full, then another, and another again. Never, it seemed to me, had there been such a storm as this. We were all silent, for it was a sight both splendid and terrible to see. The rain filtered down upon me through a crevice in the rocks, but I neither saw nor felt it. I sat on the stone seat with my hands clasped round my knees, and my eyes fixed on the sullen sky, where the lightnings played in fiery splendor, while the trees below stood mute and still, passively bearing all the brunt of the storm.

At length, and as if by magic, thunder and lightning ceased, the rain was over, the clouds rolled away, the blue sky smiled once more, the landscape became bright and glittering, and birds chirruped and twittered on every tree.

"Oh, that is lovely!" I cried, jumping up. "Oh! Mr. Herbert, do you think I should have time to catch that effect of sunlight on those trees? Why, where is my sketch-book?"

Mr. Herbert handed it to me with a smile, but mademoiselle observed decisively:

"My dear, you are wet; this place is damp, and we cannot leave it too soon. Besides, I am sure I heard carriage-wheels on the platform Mr. de Lusignan has probably sent for us."

I submitted, internally resolving to try to get my effect "to-morrow," with that strange, incurable folly of the young, who make so sure that the "morrow" must needs be theirs. The carriage which mademoiselle had heard was ours. She wanted to take Mr. Herbert home with us, but he shook his head and smiled as he helped us in.

"Not to-day," he answered, pleasantly; "Clovis and I must trudge home together to Barbison. But to-morrow, if you will have me, I shall be glad to call on Mrs. Henry de Lusignan."

He, too, believed in to-morrow. He, too, thought he could bend and mould to his will that most fugitive and indocile of earthly things—the Future.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE found Mr. de Lusignan and his daughter-in-law waiting for us in front of the house as we reached the gate of the Belle Gabrielle. My guardian was ill-tempered, because there had been a storm, and he asked me rather sourly if I had had enough of it.

"Enough of it, Mr. de Lusignan!" answered Elizabeth for me. "Why, Bessie is only beginning her artistic career. You do not suppose these little accidents of thunder, rain, and lightning can deter her, do you? Why, my dear," she added, feeling my limp muslin dress, "you are quite wet!—do go up to your room at once. Never mind your sketch-book—I shall take care of it. Go up to your room, I say!"

She spoke with a pretty despotism which it was very pleasant to submit to, for the scolding of some is as good as the coaxing of others. I looked at her as she stood there on the flagged terrace, with her boy by her side, as beautiful a creature as eye ever gazed upon, I thought, and I

blessed her in my heart. Surely he who was to own this lovely woman, as kind and generous as she was lovely, never could do too much to make himself still more worthy of her. My heart was full of them both—I longed to talk of him to her; and, scarcely taking time to change my things, I hurried to her room, of which I had heard the door open and close again as I was undressing. I found her leaning back on her chair, her cheek resting pensively on her hand, her eyes fastened on the pages of my sketch-book, which lay open on her lap.

"Oh, you will find nothing there, Elizabeth," I exclaimed, depreeningly. "I could not draw with the storm to-day, you know."

She raised her eyes and looked at me attentively, then smiled very sweetly.

"Do you know, Bessie, that—though you are always nice-looking, of course—there are times when you are very, very pretty."

"My goodness, Elizabeth!" I cried, "what makes you think of that?"

Elizabeth did not answer.

"Mr. Herbert gave us such a nice luncheon," I resumed, "and we drank your health in champagne, and wished you had been there."

"Thank you, dear," she said, bending her graceful head. "But I had a very nice luncheon at home, without getting a thorough wetting among the rocks."

"Mr. Herbert is coming to-morrow, Elizabeth—he wants to see you."

Elizabeth raised her eyebrows.

"Does he?" she remarked, carelessly. "And what is he doing with himself just now?"

"O Elizabeth, he is a man of such rare energy! Would you believe that, because I spoke of alchemy on Monday, and he did not know thoroughly what alchemy was, he went off on Tuesday to Paris in order to learn?"

"How many journeys he will have to take before his education is finished!" said Elizabeth, sarcastically.

I was more chagrined than I can say to hear her speak so. I began to think that she did not care, and never would care for Mr. Herbert, let him do what he could to please her.

"That little doleful look is a nice look too," she said, laughing at me; "but not so becoming as the other one, Bessie."

I could not help wondering why my looks were so much in Elizabeth's thoughts this day.

"Why, Elizabeth, what do you mean?" I asked.

"Nothing, save that Mr. Herbert took you at your best."

And as she spoke she tossed the sketch-book on the table before me, so that I could plainly see my own image on its open pages. I gave a start of such genuine surprise that she observed shrewdly:

"I see—Mr. Herbert took you unawares. It is rather his way. He gets a face by heart, then puts it down when he has the right look and attitude. What were you doing just then, Bessie? Improvising, like Corinna, at Cape Misenum?"

"I was looking at the storm," I stammered, rather confused at her bantering tone. "Yes, that is the grotto, and I sat so, I remember. But I had no idea Mr. Herbert was sketching me."

"And a very charming sketch he has made of it," remarked Elizabeth, once more quite good-humored; "and mind you, my dear little Bessie, though he has made you look so nice, he has not made you look a bit nicer than you are."

She closed the book as she said this, and, rising, came up to me and took me in her arms and kissed me heartily.

"Elizabeth, you will be kind to him to-morrow?" I pleaded as she held me.

"Yes, yes," she said a little impatiently; and she put me by as she said it.

When we left her room together, Elizabeth took my sketch-book with her. I would rather she had not done so then, but later I felt how generous and kind her object had been. She knew my guardian better than I did, and was ever ready, in her brave friendship, to put herself between him and me. It was only after dinner, however, that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan produced my sketch-book, and said to her father-in-law, who was in a tolerably genial mood after his favorite meal:

"I have got a surprise for you. Look!"

And she displayed my image to his gaze.

Mr. de Lusignan put down his *Times*, which he had just unfolded—it had only then come in—took the book, looked at the drawing, then at me.

"When did you sit for this, Bessie?" he asked, quietly.

Mrs. de Lusignan laughed.

"That is the fun of it. I found it out—I mean the portrait. Bessie looked the very image of amazement when I showed it to her. You know, that is Mr. Herbert's way. He looks at you for a certain length of time, then he sketches you unawares, and you never sit to him."

"Very good for an amateur," said my guardian, slightly; "but it would never do for a regular painter."

I bit my lip, in order not to answer, for the

remark vexed me. Elizabeth took it with imperturbable coolness.

"Is he really only an amateur?" she asked, looking surprised and innocent. "I thought he was so good a painter, and that you had chosen him because he was so to teach Bessie."

It was my guardian's weakness that he could be easily vexed and irritated, and by none more so than by his beautiful daughter-in-law.

"I did not choose Mr. Herbert to draw Bessie," he said, sharply, "but to teach Bessie how to draw.—Why, what have you been doing all this time, child?" he added, looking over the pages of the book—"nothing, so far as I can see."

"Not so much, to be sure," said Mrs. de Lusignan; "but, then, Mr. Herbert is an amateur teacher, not a professional one, and all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

"Then Jack has not had a dull time of it, I am happy to say," he retorted.

"I am so glad to hear you say so," she replied; "it is quite pleasant to think that, thanks to your management, Bessie and Mr. Herbert have been enjoying themselves all this time."

I could not bear this.

"Painting is Mr. Herbert's profession; he is not an amateur," I said. "He means to live by it."

Though nothing had passed between Elizabeth and me on this subject, I felt sure that I was telling her no news, and I thought myself bound to enlighten my guardian. The flash in Elizabeth's eye warned me too late that I was treading on dangerous ground. There was no sort of need to enlighten Mr. de Lusignan, who knew far better than I did Mr. Herbert's real circumstances; but it would have been well not to give him an opportunity for attack, which he had been waiting and watching for all along.

"Poor fellow!" he said, contemptuously, "he cannot help being his mother's son, I suppose. Still, though I knew he had gambled desperately, I did not think matters were so bad as that with him. To live by his pictures!—poor fellow!"

I heard him with dismay, but Elizabeth took up the glove at once.

"Mr. Herbert is no gambler," she said, shortly and sharply.

Mr. de Lusignan laughed.

"What do you call speculating, if it be not gambling?" he asked. "This Mr. Eugène Herbert comes into his property when he is twenty-one; and a very decent little bit of property it is—not landed, thanks to his mother, who had him disinherited by his cousin, but a very decent lot he had, nevertheless, in the way of funded prop-

erty—and where is it now? Down the sea with the Spanish galliots. The man must have been mad!" and Mr. de Lusignan laughed again.

I could not help putting in a protest.

"But how can Mr. Herbert's property have gone down the sea?"

"Because the man is an idiot," answered my guardian, with unmitigated scorn. "You do not seem to know what he has done with his money, Bessie; well, then, I will tell you. Be it known unto you that, in a great naval battle fought on the coasts of Spain some hundred and fifty years ago or so, twenty Spanish ships, all laden with silver ingots, were sunk, and never recovered. Three years ago a company was founded, of which the object was to try to coax old Neptune into giving some of this treasure back. A certain Johnson was the real, though not the nominal, manager and instigator of the affair. He got hold of Mr. Herbert, who prudently invested all he had—say the capital of some two or three thousand a year—in the venture. Of course, Johnson was a swindler, who soon disappeared; of course, Neptune would give nothing back; and, of course, Mr. Herbert will never see a farthing of his money again. Now, I say, that the man who risks his all on such a cast is a gambler. I will make bold to add that he is an idiot as well."

"Dear me," exclaimed Elizabeth, "I thought you were one of the share-holders in that particular company."

Mr. de Lusignan was taken by surprise. He reddened, and bit his lip.

"Oh! a trifle, a mere trifle, a twenty-pound share or so," he said, hastily.

"But still, what a pity to throw away twenty pounds or so, when the concern was so manifestly bad!" argued Elizabeth.

"Oh! it looked better at first, of course," he said, in the same quick way. "A few rusty cannons, and some hundred pounds or so of silver ingots, were fished up; then Johnson fled, and the bubble burst. I was one of the first to sell out, at sixty per cent. loss; but Mr. Herbert stuck to his shares, like a simpleton."

"Well, well," remarked Elizabeth, with great philosophy, "it is a comfort that Mr. Herbert can paint, at least. I really think he will make a very good portrait-painter. I find Bessie's likeness charming."

"It certainly looks as if he appreciated the original," he retorted.

"I hope he does," she said, looking at me very kindly; then, rising from the table—all this had taken place in the dining-room—she made a sign, which I gladly obeyed, and we left my dis-

comforted guardian to his wine. Her blue eyes were full of fun as she looked at me, in the act of closing the door.

"Don't I play him out nicely?" she said, in a whisper.

"O Elizabeth!"

Her hand was laid on my lips, and checked me at once.

"My dear, if he does not like it, let him not seek for it. Will you have a walk?"

"Not this evening," I said, hesitatingly. "I must go and sit a while with mademoiselle." For she had left us as soon as dinner was over.

"Do, then. I shall walk alone."

She took down her hat, which was hanging in the hall, and, with a nod, she went out of the house into the garden, whence I saw her entering a path, down which she walked with her free and stately step.

I did not stay long with mademoiselle, nor, to say the truth, had I intended doing so. I wanted to think, and be alone, a while. What did that quarrel between my guardian and Elizabeth, that quarrel of which I was the pretence and ostensible subject, what did it mean? My breath came fast as I attempted to answer the question. Shame, anger, and grief, struggled within me for empire. I looked out of my window, I sat down, I rose, and, finally, opening my sketch-book, I looked at the portrait which had created so strange a controversy.

I may talk of that now; looks of mine have ceased to matter, but they were something then, and I had my share of their pleasantness in those days. Handsome and beautiful are strong words, and neither could have applied to me. I was not the garden-rose, I was only a field-flower, but then the field-flower can charm the eye and tempt the hand of many a wayfarer, and Mr. Herbert had taken me at my best. I felt it, as I looked at his little sketch, and, closing the book hurriedly, I tried to think of other things. I soon succeeded; perhaps because I was very drowsy. A wakeful nightingale was trilling his melodious lay on the topmost boughs of a tree which grew near my window. I listened to him, but I thought I should admire him so much more comfortably if I were lying down, that I curled myself round on my bed, and before five minutes were over I was fast asleep.

I had been sleeping an hour or so, when a light flashing across my eyelids made me waken up with a start. Elizabeth was standing by my bed, with a little lamp in her hand. If I had been one of the ancient vestals, and had allowed the sacred fire to die out while I slept in my

chair, I could scarcely have felt more frightened than I did then.

"I am so sorry," gently said Elizabeth. "You look terrified. But I really thought I heard you saying, 'Come in.' I had no idea that you were in bed."

"Nor am I," replied I, slipping down on my feet. "I lay down to hear the nightingale sing, and when it left off I fell asleep."

"May I stay?" asked Elizabeth. She spoke as softly as if she had never had a will of her own, and as if her wishes were not always my law. I laughed, and said yes, she might stay. She put down her lamp, which she had held till then, and said, in a low voice:

"I am going by the first train to-morrow. You will not be up, so I came to say good-by."

"Going!—not going away from us, Elizabeth?"

"Oh! I shall come back," she said, carelessly.

I was filled with amazement, not unmingled with dismay.

"Does Mr. de Lusignan know this?" I asked.

"No—why should he?" She said this very sharply.

"O Elizabeth! what will he say?"

"Nothing; for I leave Harry."

There was a pause. She gave me no reason for leaving so suddenly; she gave me no sort of clue to the goal of her journey. I felt she was sending me miles away, as usual, and that I must put no questions. Still, I could not help saying:

"Will you be long away, Elizabeth?"

"I do not know," she replied, slowly.

Her tone struck me, and, looking at her, I saw that Elizabeth was altered since dinner-time. Her cheeks were flushed, unusual light burned in her eyes, her lovely lips had a tender, tremulous motion as she spoke. If we both had been mediæval women, I should have fancied that some powerful necromancer had just shown her strange visions in his magic glass, or that some friendly alchemist had compounded for her one of those subtle draughts in which he had steeped mandragora, that mysterious root which shrieked when gathered by witches at midnight on the spot where a felon had died. I was sitting on the edge of my bed, looking at her with my hands folded on my lap. I started to my feet with a sudden conviction.

"Elizabeth," I cried, "something has happened. You are going because something has happened. What is it?"

"My goodness, how you did frighten me!"

she said, opening her eyes wide, and taking up her lamp to go. "I thought something had happened. Well, something has happened," she added, with a little short laugh. "Mr. de Lusignan's *Times* has vanished, and Mr. de Lusignan is distracted. No cat who has been robbed of her young could show greater signs of distress for her kittens than he does for his paper. I advised him to telegraph for another copy."

Her light tone puzzled me. The meaning had passed from her face. She looked as she looked every day.

"I came to bid you good-by," she said. "Also"—her voice shook a little—"to ask you to be kind, or rather kinder than you usually are, to my little Harry while I am away."

"I shall give him a double allowance of kisses," I answered, trying to speak gayly. "And what about Mr. Herbert, Elizabeth?" I asked, seeing that she was moving toward the door. "Does he know you are going?"

"Not unless he guessed it," she said, carelessly. "Oh! you may tell him any thing you like," she added, with a little yawn. "I dare say you will make it all right, and do it ever so much better than I should. And now good-night, and good-by, Bessie."

She stretched out her hand, and grasped mine in that frank, cordial clasp which was so friendly and so pleasant. I think I wished her a happy journey, and she was gone.

I felt strangely bewildered. What should I do?—or, indeed, should I do any thing? I promptly decided that inaction was my only course, and, as the best means of securing it, I took care not to stir out of my room that night.

CHAPTER XXII.

DREAMS have never been to me what they seem to be to many people. They have not stepped out from beneath their gates of ivory to come and whisper in my sleeping ear new tales of the future; they have not flitted about my pillow like birds of evil omen, then fled away screaming, and leaving behind them, as they left to ill-fated Clarence or guilty Richard, the darkness of a coming storm; but there is one form which, in seasons of trouble, they have invariably taken—that of great weariness, and this aspect they assumed in the slumbers which followed my parting with Elizabeth. I dreamed that she and I were walking in one of the paths of the forest, but it was she who led the way, and, though I

followed her as closely as I could, I never could overtake her. In vain I caught a glimpse of her flowing garments every now and then, neither did she look back, nor had I the power to call her. I could only follow on, though I felt footsore and so weary, until at length she vanished, leaving me in utter solitude, and with the sense of so heavy a trouble upon me, though what that trouble was I could not tell, that I sat down upon the earth and wept aloud, and found myself in tears when I woke.

At first I only saw by the brightness without that it was late, and that I had overslept myself. Then suddenly I wondered what trouble it was that ailed me, and remembering that Elizabeth was gone, I felt depressed and unhappy, I could scarcely have said why.

I dressed at once and went down. Every thing was quiet below; my guardian was invisible, and mademoiselle was still in her room. I went to the garden, and there saw Watkins with Harry in one of the alleys. The child ran to me, and, mindful of my promise to his mother, I took him up in my arms and kissed him very fondly.

"Ma 'leep," volunteered Harry, in that concise form of speech which is one of the privileges of his years.

"Then let ma 'leep," I replied, thinking it wise to encourage his belief in this innocent fiction.

I looked at Watkins, but her stolid face gave no answer to the question which mine conveyed. Even had I been inclined to say more, I should have had no time to do so, for Hermance came hurrying up the path in breathless haste.

"Oh, please, will mademoiselle come back?" she said. "Monsieur will be in such a way!"

"About me, Hermance?"

"Oh, yes, all about mademoiselle. I was not to lose sight of mademoiselle's door, and to tell monsieur as soon as mademoiselle came down."

I felt rather flurried. Was it possible that Elizabeth had gone without telling him of her intention?—and if so, should I be questioned, and, oh, my goodness, what was I to say? I gave Hermance a frightened look, which she answered by an imploring "If mademoiselle would be so good!" that spoke her apprehensions of a scolding very plainly.

With desperate resignation, I complied. I was not kept long in suspense. Mr. de Lusignan was walking up and down in front of the terrace, and pounced upon me in a second.

"Why, Bessie," he said, impatiently, "you must be one of the Seven Sleepers! What made you so late on this morning, when I particularly

wanted to speak to you? I fancy you know what I mean," he added, bending his keen look on me, and contracting his bushy eyebrows so ominously that I stood before him silent and convicted. Luckily he saved me from the consequences of my foolish confusion, by adding, in his hasty way: "And where have you put it, pray?"

He spoke sharply and angrily, but that "it" puzzled me more than his anger frightened me.

"I really do not understand," I stammered.

"Why, don't you see that Mr. de Lusignan thinks you have purloined his *Times*?" said the gay voice of Elizabeth, behind me.

I turned round, amazed; she stood there, within two paces of us, calm, unconcerned, bare-headed, and in a delicate muslin dress which did not look like travelling-attire.

"Then you have not got it!" exclaimed my guardian, looking both impatient and disappointed.

"No, indeed," I replied, rather affronted. "You seem to have forgotten, sir, that you forbade me to read the *Times*."

I said this with some dignity, but the provoking man only whistled.

"Your great-grandmother Eve was forbidden to eat of a certain apple; I am not aware that she was very obedient, Bessie."

"Oh! if you compare me to Eve—" I began, indignantly.

"You give it up," he interrupted. "Well, I do not give up my *Times*, mind you."

His brows were knit again, and Elizabeth nodded to me as much as to say, "I told you so," with a most provoking assumption of intelligence.

"Then you knew about it?" he said, sharply.

"I went in last night to tell Bessie," she said coolly, "and I described your distracted state in the most forcible language—in fact, compared you to a cat that had just been robbed of her kittens—did I not, Bessie?"

If my guardian had faults of temper, he could at least take a jest at his own expense. He looked at his lovely daughter-in-law and smiled.

"It is all very well for you, *belle dame*," he said, with a sigh, "to take it so. You are the rose in all your prime—the garden is yours, and sunshine, and breezes, and night and morning dews—but I the withered tree, with boughs blasted by many a storm, and scarcely a yellow leaf trembling on its twigs, I cling to all that is left to me—little enough, Heaven knows! My *Times* is one of those few enjoyments. I read it, and I file it. The *Times* is our modern epic—our life dramatized, its story told from day to day, and year to

year. Its philosophy is quite awful to one of my weak mind. I find wit and satire even in its advertisement-sheets. What a long list of places wanted!—what a brief one of places offered! And then its column of 'To Let'—was there ever any thing like it? What villas and cottages there must be on the surface of the earth, since England alone furnishes this bewildering quantity!—and they are all so desirable, too! And you wonder that I am distracted when one valuable number of that treasure is gone!"

"But how did it go?" I could hardly help asking.

"Yes, do tell me that," he said, with evident irritation. "The postman had just brought it. I had just opened it in the dining-room, where I sat alone after dinner, when the gardener asked to show me 'his improvements.' I went; when I came back, half an hour later, the *Times* had vanished, and *no one had seen it*."

"Very mysterious," said Elizabeth, demurely—"quite like an incident in a novel." Then, seeming struck with a brilliant idea, she added, with the most innocent look in her face: "Perhaps the wind blew it away—the window was open, was it not?"

"Yes," he dryly answered, "wide open. I should not wonder if the *Times*, being wide open too, had, as you suggest, flown across the court, across the street, across the gardens opposite, even into the forest. Very likely, as you say."

"But I did not say it was likely," exclaimed Elizabeth, opening her eyes wide. "I say 'perhaps,' Mr. de Lusignan. I do not give an opinion, do I?"

They looked at each other. How often these looks of civil defiance did pass between these two! But the breakfast-bell put an end to the contest, for one could not take a glass of water in Fontainebleau without being rung for.

"Have you found the *Times*?" were Mademoiselle's first words to my guardian when we all entered the dining-room together.

"No, I have not," he answered, in a vexed tone. "I must write for another number."

Mademoiselle Aubrey looked as if she thought the incident a strange one. I confess I thought so too. None of our French servants could care to look at the *Times*. It was most unlikely that Watkins should have entered the dining-room to do so; besides, I remembered that she and Harry had kept up a conversation beneath my window before I fell asleep. I certainly had not purloined the missing paper, and I felt sure of Mademoiselle's integrity. Then who was guilty? Elizabeth? But why should she do this thing? Mr.

de Lusignan had not prohibited her from reading his paper. Was it not more likely that some stranger had come in and taken it away? But, no, this was utterly improbable. Or that some accident had happened to the newspaper, and that the author of it had suppressed his victim, as some murderers bury their dead, to hide every trace of their crime? Truly all this was very odd; but was it not odd, too, that Elizabeth, after bidding me good-by, should still be here?

"I really must know what she means," I thought. "For once I will question her." But if my purpose had been written in my face, Elizabeth could not have avoided me more carefully and more successfully than she did this morning. Her tactics were the simplest possible. She did not leave my guardian's side, but kept close to him, to all seeming deeply interested in the "improvements" which had facilitated the unlucky abduction of the *Times*. I, too, went about behind them, waiting in vain for my opportunity. It came not. For once I should have liked to break my appointment with Mr. Herbert, and I confess I did my best to do so.

"Dear mademoiselle," I hypocritically argued, "I am sure this stormy weather disagrees with you. I really do think we ought to stay within."

"I am particularly well to-day," replied mademoiselle, "so get ready, Mignonne."

Beaten on this head, I tried another line of attack.

"I am afraid it is not worth while going, mademoiselle. There is nothing for me to draw at Fort l'Empereur, and I cannot hope to get to-day the effect I saw yesterday."

"Then shall I tell you what we can do, Mignonne. We will keep our appointment with Mr. Herbert, and make him take us to the little Church of Avon, which is close by. You said the other day you wanted to see the grave of Monaldeschi. And he will come back with us, you know."

I yielded, with a sort of despair; so we went and found Mr. Herbert, who most willingly took us to the Church of Avon. He was bright and happy as the day, and I knew why. He was to accompany us home, and to see Elizabeth.

The Church of Avon is very old and gray, a village church, where peasants and their feudal lords have prayed for many generations. It was empty when we entered it, but a sunbeam stole in on the white altar-cloth, through an open side-door, and deepened the cool gloom which lingered around the porch. Here, close to the holy-water vessel, sleeps Monaldeschi. A plain stone, recording the day and hour when he was put to death, and buried, marks the spot.

"Poor fellow!" said mademoiselle, and, kneeling in one of the wooden pews, she prayed tenderly and fervently, as was her wont; for, if I have not already said it, I may say it now, to pray with her whole heart, as if she were a young nun in the first fervor of her vows, was one of her many gifts.

Surely prayer is as a strong wing, which raises us above this world and its cares. But sometimes even the mighty pinions flag wearily, not so much in seasons of sorrow as in days of doubt and perplexity. I envied mademoiselle her serene fervor, as I looked at her. She was praying for Monaldeschi. He had been dead two hundred years, or more, but what right has man to measure his charity by time? He had died a fearful and violent death. Had he been able to say, "Thy will be done," or, harder still, "Forgive me, as I forgive Christina of Sweden!" What right had I to be so cold and lukewarm as to take it for granted that he had reached heavenly mercy, or passed beyond it? Who can fathom the dread secrets of that terrible world toward which we all journey on so carelessly? Thus I argued with myself; but, though the lips should pray, the heart will often wander elsewhere, and so it was with me. And yet Mr. Herbert, too, was praying. I needed only to look at his calm, reverent face and bare brow, to be sure that even Elizabeth was put by, and that Heaven had him all.

"I never enter a church but I think of my mother," he said to us both, as we went out and stood in the porch.

He said it simply, with an almost boyish ingenuousness. I looked at him, and half smiled, and I little knew that I had read that meaning on his face for the last time. Never again, so far as my knowledge of him went, was that countenance to wear that simple, trusting look.

"I think I should like to go back and copy the inscription on Monaldeschi's stone," I said to mademoiselle.

"Shall I do it for you?" he quickly asked.

"Thank you—you are very kind; but—"

"You prefer doing it yourself," he suggested, smiling. "Then do so, by all means. I shall wait here with mademoiselle."

So she sat down on a stone ledge in the porch, and he stood by her in the sunshine, while I went back and took out my note-book. My pencil broke before I had half done, and I was opening the side-door, to ask Mr. Herbert if he had another to lend me, when words uttered by mademoiselle arrested me.

"That sketch does you great credit, Mr. Her

bert," she was saying. "It is a very happy likeness of Mignonne."

I was amazed to learn by this remark that mademoiselle had seen the sketch Mr. Herbert had taken of me, though I had neither mentioned nor shown it to her. But I was coming out, spite of my surprise, when Mr. Herbert's answer made me shrink back from the door as if it were burning.

"You have given her a pretty name," he said, "and one most appropriate to her, though she is not small, by any means; but there is something very neat and dainty about her."

"Yes," said mademoiselle; "she is graceful and pretty."

"Oh! very pretty," he answered, with an emphasis that made me step back still farther from the door. "Besides," he continued, "she has a look at times that has often tempted me."

I thought it best to hear no more, and so came out at once; but I said nothing about the broken pencil, nor asked for another. Perhaps mademoiselle guessed, with her usual shrewdness, that I might have heard her, for she said, quite openly:

"We were talking of your portrait, Mignonne—it is a very nice likeness, though a mere sketch."

And then, without waiting for any answer of mine, she spoke of something else.

Mr. Herbert sat opposite me in the carriage. I noticed how bright his face grew as we neared Fontainebleau. It was all pure sunshine when we alighted at the gate, but sunshine on which a deep, dark cloud quickly followed, for Mr. de Lusignan, who received us on the terrace where he so liked to smoke his cigar, lost no time in dealing him a sure blow.

"How do you do, Mr. Herbert?" he said, very kindly. "Well, of course? So you had a storm yesterday. Well, the weather is stormy. I was telling Mrs. Henry de Lusignan she ought not to go to Paris to-day. But ladies are wilful."

Mr. Herbert looked confounded as he heard this. I was so prepared for it that it never occurred to me that I ought to look amazed; and mademoiselle alone exclaimed, with genuine surprise:

"Why, how suddenly Mrs. Henry de Lusignan resolved to go! She said nothing of it before we left."

Mr. de Lusignan answered, with much gravity:

"After you left, Mrs. Henry de Lusignan discovered, on opening the book of fashion which the post brought in this morning, that she had

not a thing to wear. She started for Paris without delay. She does not, of course, intend returning for a day or two. I told her we should not see her for a week, for I never heard of matters so important as these being transacted in a day or two by the most expeditious of ladies."

No one answered this remark. Mr. Herbert spoke of our visit to the Church of Avon, and we all walked together in the grounds, which were always very pleasant at this hour. Mr. Herbert once lingered behind to say to me: "Did she know I was coming?"

His eyes were fastened on mine in eager inquiry. How glad he would have been if I had said "No!" but I could not deny the truth.

"I told her you were coming," I said, reluctantly.

Spite of his mustache, I saw him gnaw his nether lip; then suddenly he smiled, a smile in which there was both sweetness and scorn.

I did not dare to utter so much as one word to soothe the keenness of his disappointment. If he could think that her departure was as spontaneous and unpremeditated an act as it seemed to be, let him. Why should he not have that honeyed edge to this cup of bitter medicine?

CHAPTER XXIII.

ELIZABETH never told me why, after bidding me good-by at night, she had delayed her departure till the next afternoon. But she was the most generous of women, and I fancied even then that the delay had been incurred for my sake. Hermance had seen her as she left my room on that evening, and I believe it was in order not to commit me that she waited till the post brought her in that convenient "Follet" which, if it did not quite lull Mr. de Lusignan's suspicions to sleep, at least did not let them fall upon me.

And now that she was gone, I was mindful of my promise to pet Master Harry. I kept it most conscientiously, though, alas! most imperfectly, for the provoking little monkey, who received my caresses with the coolest disregard, was always escaping from me to get into some mischief or other.

The day that followed the departure of Elizabeth was one of fresh summer rain, which came down loud and rushing, with the noise and impetuosity of a young torrent. Mademoiselle went to the window, looked up at the sky, shook her head, took up her book, and, settling herself

down comfortably in an arm-chair, said, with evident satisfaction:

"I do not think we can go out to-day, Mignonne."

If she was pleased to stay within, so was I. Mr. Herbert might question me more closely than I should like, and, if so, what could I say? So we stayed at home. Mademoiselle devoted herself to her book, and I concentrated all my energies upon Harry. I have had some days of trouble, but few to equal this. An eel would have been more easily managed, and far less slippery than this young fellow; and, when his grandpapa at length delivered me by taking him up to his work-room in order to show him his lathe, I felt both relieved and exhausted. It was raining still, and I sat by the window doing nothing, and looking rather languidly at the heavy rain, while a note from Elizabeth, which had just come, lay on my lap. It was a very kind little note, but it told me nothing whatever, and did not even allude to that number of the "Follet" which had served as an excuse for Mr. de Lusignan. I loved her very dearly, but I keenly felt that we were divided by something deeper and further than the miles of land which lay between us. The heart of Elizabeth was as a locked casket, of which, come what would, I should never hold the key. I also had other thoughts as I watched the stormy clouds drifting across the gray sky. James had not written to me for weeks, though I had twice written to him little notes, which I had thought proper to show to mademoiselle. Was he ill? or was he forgetting me?

I believe I was getting low-spirited, when Harry burst into the drawing-room, waving triumphantly a stick which his grandfather had just given him. He flourished it aloft in such dangerous proximity to a china vase of flowers on one of the tables, that mademoiselle uttered a cry of alarm, and I rushed to the rescue.

"Come with me, darling," I cried, taking him up in my arms. "I have something so pretty, oh! so pretty, to show you."

Surprise kept him mute, but when the drawing-room door closed upon us, and he saw himself not merely shut out, but taken down-stairs, he became so unruly that I resorted to stern measures, and threatened Master Harry with being put in a corner. This brought on a violent fit of weeping, which I had to stop by the most humiliating and dishonorable concessions ever made by a prime-minister to his rebellious Commons.

"Take me up'tairs," imperiously said Harry.

I complied, but would not yield the drawing-

room point on any terms; my room should do. But here we differed again.

"Not your room—ma's." This injunction I thought it best to obey. "Now," said the tyrant, climbing up on a high chair, whence his little fat legs dangled down, "make a boat."

"I have no paper," I demurred.

He jumped down with great alacrity, pulled open the drawer of a little *chiffonnier*, and put in my hands a torn fragment of the *Times* supplement.

I could not help starting as I looked at it. In a moment my eyes flew to the head of the page; the date was still there—Friday, July 10, 186—, and with the date fragments of writing where the direction had passed beyond the cover. Quite plainly I read the letters "ale," and beneath them "eau." Could I doubt that this paper had been directed to the Rue Royale, Fontainebleau? Was it not plain as plain could be that Elizabeth had taken Mr. de Lusignan's *Times*? I felt more frightened than surprised, and my first act was to crumple up the paper and thrust it into my pocket. Harry raised a cry, and began stamping most vehemently.

"Do not," I said, quickly. "I shall make you a green boat, so much prettier! Come to my room for a green boat, Harry," and, pacified at once by this seductive promise, Harry forgot his precious bit of paper, and followed me.

If Elizabeth had abstracted a thousand-pound Bank of England note instead of Mr. de Lusignan's *Times*, my hands could not have shaken more than they did when I cut out Harry's green boat. I had suspected her all along, but to have the actual proof of her guilt in my pocket, made me feel the most wretched of beings. I longed to look at the paper again, and try to find out that I had been mistaken; that this supplement did not belong to the missing number, after all. But Harry stuck to me as closely as a young leech. After the green boat he felt an insatiable desire for a green hen, and this was followed by an imperious injunction for chairs and a table. I was in despair, when Watkins at length made her appearance, and took him away.

I locked my door as soon as they were gone. Alas! there could be no doubt about it; my eyes had not deceived me—the date, the fragments of writing, were only too convincing. This supplement had belonged to my guardian's paper, and, for some motive which I could not fathom, Elizabeth had stolen and kept it. I wearied my brain with useless conjectures, then locked up the proof of her guilt in the deepest recesses of my desk, the key of which never left me.

There is wonderful wisdom in the old legend of the barber to that golden king whose ears were so unfortunately distinguished. He went and whispered his troublesome secret to the reeds of the river, and left its banks relieved and light-hearted. I, too, required to open my heart, and lighten my mind of its burden! I neither could nor would do so, but I needed it sadly, and often during the rest of that afternoon I looked at mademoiselle, thinking it hard that I could not tell all to this good and wise woman. She was quick to detect my uneasiness, and even made a shrewd guess as to its motive.

"Mignonne," she said, laying her hand on my arm, and looking wistfully in my face, "there is something on your mind." Then, in a half-jesting tone, she added, "Had you any thing to do with the *Times*?"

"I!" cried I, starting back from her so that she laughed.

"My dear, your virtuous horror silences me. Of course, you could have nothing to do with it—not even the spilling of the contents of an ink-stand upon it."

"No, I had nothing to do with it," I said, gravely—"nothing whatever;" and, feeling how dangerous my looks were, I set a guard over them.

The *Times* seemed pregnant with mischief and meaning—so, far, at least, as we were concerned.

An hour later, Mr. de Lusignan came to me with two newspapers in his hand.

"I have got my missing number," he said triumphantly, as we met in the court.

"Got it!" I exclaimed, "why, who had it?"

"Oh! I do not mean the number that was actually stolen from me," he replied, a little shortly—it always vexed him to think of this—"but its twin-brother, which will do very well for filing."

"And will you not read it?" I asked.

He raised his eyebrows, and thrust forth his thick nether lip in a way that was habitual to him when he felt amused at some of his own inconsistencies.

"Well, my dear," he remarked, confidentially, "I do not think I shall. It is dreadful to miss one's *Times*, but when it is missed, it would be dreadful, too, to have to go through it. These three hundred and thirteen brothers are delightful company when one gets hold of them singly, but two at a time is a leetle too much for the brevity of life as it is now practised by our generation. In the *Scudéry* or *Clarissa Harlowe* days that might do, but not now—not now."

"And so you will not read it?" I retorted, feeling, as I dare say I looked, disappointed.

"No, I really will not. Your question settles the matter. I must keep something for my old age, Bessie, and, to avoid the temptation, I shall file it at once."

He left me, and, entering the house, went upstairs. Presently the lattice-windows of his work-room opened, and my guardian's head was thrust out of it, and looked down at me, where I was still standing in the court.

"It is filed, Mignonne," he said, in a shrill falsetto. Then the window was closed, and when I went up to the drawing-room, I found my guardian reading his other number of the *Times*, with his usual gusto. When mademoiselle joined us, he told her that he had got the missing number, and had filed it without reading it.

"By-the-way, though, you would have cared for it, I dare say," he added, carelessly. "You can have it, you know."

"No, thank you," she answered, smiling. "You know I never read half of it."

If either of these two had known that Elizabeth had taken the *Times*, and had suspected, as I did, that it had led to her journey, they might have cared more for the despised paper. My guardian's indifference would surely have vanished, and mademoiselle's civil acquiescence, with his evident wish that the filed number might not be disturbed, would not have been quite so genuine. I confess my equanimity was sorely disturbed by the knowledge that a clew to the mystery was so nigh me. At first this was only a vague feeling, on which no actual wish followed. Then I thought of the room in which Mr. de Lusignan amused himself with his lathe, and where he kept his files of papers. Yes, the clew to all knowledge must be there. Then swiftly came another conclusion: if one were only there, one might find it all out.

But if my guardian had a secret room, like Bluebeard, he was wiser than that unlucky gentleman; he trusted the key of it to none, but kept it in his pocket. There was no chance of getting into that room, and even if there had been a chance, "you would not do so mean a thing," said I to my own thoughts. I have already said it, and I must say it again. I was very young—young in experience as well as in years. I was very ready to believe in most people, because I had great faith in myself, and my knowledge of Bessie Carr, and that sad frailty which she shared with others, and which is the source of half our sins, was as yet very stinted and imperfect. My

falls had been so slight and few, that I might be forgiven if I forgot them. They were mere stumbles, that could not teach me humility for myself, nor indulgence for other wayfarers on the path. My own security was therefore tinged with as much abstract severity as great faith in every one around me allowed. Sin, weakness, mere imperfection, were all dreadful heresies, against which, like a good, orthodox little soul, I felt a sort of devout hatred, very unreasonable indeed, but very natural. That I should enter my guardian's room, and there steal forbidden knowledge, was quite out of the question—at least, I thought so.

I learned my mistake the very next morning. Mademoiselle said to me: "I wish you could find out Mr. de Lusignan for me, Mignonne. I have sent Hermance in every direction for him, and she cannot discover him. I want to settle some accounts with him at once."

"He is busy with his lathe," I answered. "I saw him going up to his room."

"Hermance went there, and knocked, but got no answer. Besides, the key was not in the door."

"The key never is in the door, mademoiselle. I feel confident he is there, and shall try at once."

I ran up-stairs, and soon reached the door of my guardian's attic. The key was not in the door, but when I knocked, the door itself yielded to my touch, and I stood on the threshold of the room. It was empty. I saw the lathe, and fragments of the juniper-tree from which the *Souvenirs de Fontainebleau* are supposed to be made; and I also saw, not merely the files of the *Times* newspaper, but a number of that magic paper itself lying, with my guardian's tools, on a little deal table by me. Woman-like, I had instincts and rapid intuitions. "This is the paper," I thought; and, without taking time to reflect, I took it up. I had just read the date, Friday, July 10, 186-, no more, when a hand was laid on my shoulder, and my guardian's voice said quietly:

"Do not, Bessie."

My life, though not an eventful one, has had its share of dramatic moments. There have been minutes in it pregnant with the bliss or misery of years, when my fate hung on a thread as momentous as any the fatal sisters ever spun or clipped. But never did I feel then what I felt when my guardian's hand was laid on my shoulder, and he said these words: "Do not, Bessie."

The paper dropped from my trembling hands, my limbs shook under me, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, I was speechless and mo-

tionless. And yet nothing that I might dread was to be read in the calm, sad countenance that now met my own scared face. No irony, no scorn, no mocking triumph was there. Mr. de Lusignan seemed to forget that I was doing a mean, shameless thing. I felt even then that there lay between us the cold barrier of some overpowering thought, and merely picking up the paper, he said to me, in the same low voice:

"You may leave me child—that will do."

I went to the door; then, recollecting my errand, said, "Mademoiselle wants you, sir."

"Does she?—ah! to be sure. Well, tell her that I am coming—and, Bessie—"

"Yes, sir."

"You will say nothing else to her, mind you—*nothing else*."

I understood him very well; and, glad to escape on these terms, I answered, eagerly:

"Very well, sir, I shall say nothing else."

"Mind you do not."

Still, his tone, though emphatic, was neither stern nor threatening. He had read in the paper in his hand what I could not tell; but something that put me miles away from his displeasure or his wrath.

I went down, and told mademoiselle that I had found Mr. de Lusignan, and that he was coming. She silently put on her spectacles, and, looking at me, she said:

"I have read that those unlucky persons who went down to the cave of Trophonius in the times when that cave existed, had a very odd, scared look when they came out of it. Is Mr. de Lusignan's room such a place, Mignonne, that you look so—so very—what shall I call it?"

It was lucky for me that my guardian came in just then. I left him with mademoiselle, and when we drove out together to meet Mr. Herbert at Fort l'Empereur, she either forgot my looks, or was too kind to renew her inquiry about them.

The day was gray and sultry. There was no sort of effect at Fort l'Empereur, and Mr. Herbert was the first to remark:

"I fear we cannot do much to-day."

"Yes," I answered, "I fear so."

I did not care about drawing. I was full of my own thoughts and feelings, not to speak of the discomfiture I had sustained that morning. If all these things had not filled my little brain to overflowing, I should probably have noticed how silent and abstracted Mr. Herbert was that day; and, if he had not been so himself, he would probably have perceived the change in me. We neither of us cared for work, and we loitered about, and wandered up and down, talking ab-

sently enough of any thing; while mademoiselle watched us with a puzzled and, indeed, most dissatisfied air. After a while she joined us, and, to my surprise, left us no more.

"I am afraid it will tire you to walk so much," I said, very simply.

"Thank you, Mignonne," she answered, smiling, "it does me good, even though I do not like it. Do you not draw to-day?"

"I cannot. The lights and shadows are all altered."

"Then sit to Mr. Herbert for your portrait."

Before he could answer, I hastened to reply.

"Oh! I could not sit still. Indeed, I could not to-day."

I looked deprecatingly at Mr. Herbert, but there was no need to do so. He glanced at his watch, and said:

"I find I must leave you. Have you any commands for London, Miss Carr?"

"For London?" I cried. "You are going to London?"

"Yes, I leave to-morrow. I did not know it when I saw you before yesterday, but I got news this morning which will make me go. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you," I said, a little coldly. I was not mistrustful, but I could not help thinking that he had heard from Elizabeth, and that this sudden journey of his was connected with her.

"Nothing?" he repeated, with a smile.

"No; Mrs. Dawson is gone, and there is not a soul in London who cares for me."

"But there may be a soul in Yorkshire," he insisted; "and I can go down to Yorkshire."

I shook my head, and said, dryly:

"Thank you very much. I heard from Yorkshire this morning."

He did not insist, but turned toward mademoiselle.

"Surely, I can do something for you?" he said, gently.

"Oh! dear, yes. Do bring me some darning-needles, please. Those I get here are no good."

"I shall not forget," he said, in his pleasant way; and giving me a doubtful, reproachful look, he parted from us.

"Mignonne, what made you so cross with Mr. Herbert?" asked mademoiselle, point-blank, as we drove home.

"Surely, mademoiselle, I was not cross."

"Yes, my dear, very cross. Don't you like him?"

"Indeed, mademoiselle, I do. I like him very much."

Did I say this with much ardor, or had what followed long been brooding in her mind, that mademoiselle, laying her hand on my arm, looked earnestly in my face, and said, in a low voice:

"Take care, Mignonne, that you do not like him too much!"

I looked at her in more amazement than indignation. Like him, the lover of Elizabeth? But then she did not know that. Like him, the friend of James Carr, too much?

"Yes, I mean it," she resumed, composedly. "I know he admires Mrs. Henry, but he is very kind to you, and very good, and handsome; and, I say it again, take care that you do not like him too much!"

She startled me. I questioned my own heart in sudden terror; but, with a sigh of relief, I heard it answer as plain a "No" as heart thus questioned ever gave back. I looked her in the face, and smiled.

"I am not afraid," I said. "I am quite safe."

"Well, I do believe you are," she answered, frankly, and evidently relieved of her fears.

And now I saw why her manner had altered so much—why Mr. Herbert and I had been accompanied that day; and, though his watchfulness of mademoiselle was very kind, I felt rather affronted, and was both sulky and silent, I fear, all the way home. Hermance met us at the gate, with news in her face.

"Did these ladies meet monsieur?" she asked.

"No. Did he go to meet us?"

This Hermance could not tell. She knew that monsieur had driven off to the railway, and if these ladies had been near it, why, they might have met monsieur.

"Ah! ça, is every one going away?" exclaimed mademoiselle, fairly surprised.

I was not very much astonished. Of course it was something in the *Times* that had sent away my guardian, as it had sent away Elizabeth before him, and of course that was why he had enjoined silence upon me. Luckily it never occurred to mademoiselle that I had any clew to this mystery. She would not have questioned me, certainly not, but I should not have liked to feel the calm look of her shrewd eyes upon me. Indeed, such was my apprehension of her penetration that, after dinner, I went up to my room, and sat there alone for an hour.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was not merely to shun mademoiselle's blue eyes that I went up to my room. I had received a letter from James Carr that morning, and, though I had read it twice already, I could not help wanting to read it a third time.

It was a strange letter, unlike any other letter I had got from him, and it perplexed me more than I can tell. That letter I have not got now. It has perished in the great wreck of my life, with many another token of these days; but, though I may have forgotten the exact words which James used, I remember their meaning well.

"My dearest Bessie," he began, "I have been very busy all this time. The garden-wall gave way, and Jenkins sent me in a heavy bill. But that would be little or nothing, if the drought had not been so great. Crops ruined, or next thing to it, and Kate has had the small-pox. She is scarcely disfigured, but was in great danger. It was an anxious time. I would not write to you till it was over, and Susan and Polly safe."

Thus far there was nothing in this letter very different from the letters James usually wrote. The news might vary, the style was always the same; but what struck me as singular was that, instead of stopping there, James went on with a most diffuse and rambling account of local news, in which I could take no sort of interest. He seemed to me like a speaker who talks a good deal, because there is something in his mind which he does not wish to say; and yet I fancied that I found that something in his postscript.

"Why did you not tell me that Eugène Herbert was giving you drawing-lessons?"

The question thus put reminded me rather too unpleasantly of the last evening which James and I had spent together. I was conscious of no harm, and felt offended; and the more I thought over it, the more displeased I grew at a question thus worded.

My displeasure was the only "distraction," to use a French phrase, which I had about this time. We now led a very dull sort of existence—at least, it seemed dull to me, for I fancy that, in her heart, mademoiselle liked it. There is a time of life when repose is very sweet—a time when, like the lotus-eaters, we all want to sit down and dream, and look at the past through the thin veil of memory, nor trouble our wearied brains with the few doubtful days yet to come. The future, which appears to youth with her hands full of golden promises, is more niggardly to age, and either deals in stern truths, or in silence as sig-

nificant. So mademoiselle took her ease, and walked a little, and sat a good deal, and read her book, and talked to me in her shrewd, wise way; but for all that I was dull.

I missed Elizabeth, who neither wrote nor came back. I missed Mr. Herbert, and those pleasant hours which we spent together in the forest. I missed even my guardian, who, if he was provoking and wayward, yet filled a house with noise and talk. This abode of the fair Gabrielle had turned into a very quiet place. Now and then I could hear the clear laugh of Hermance far away, or the opening and the shutting of a door; but if it had not been for the prattle of little Harry, I do believe that, of all silent houses, this would have been the most silent. Yet we did not see much of the child. I could not have him, unless when I insisted upon it. Mademoiselle, who had tried to keep him under her care from the time that his mother left us, had been defeated by Watkins in her object. At first I thought the girl was jealous, but closer observation convinced me that she was only obeying some secret injunction of her mistress's; and asking myself why Elizabeth should have given such orders, I began to fear that it could only be with some ultimate view to escape. I fancy some such thought lurked in the mind of mademoiselle, but she was far too prudent to express it, even to me.

We had been thus alone five days, no more, when mademoiselle, feeling rather languid and unwell, allowed me to walk alone in the little grove at the end of our garden. This child of the forest was neither extensive nor beautiful, but it had shade and freshness, and birds built their nests in its trees, and sang their love-songs very sweetly on many a bough. I sat down, not on a bench, but on the grassy earth, and, listening to these gay little warblers, I envied their lot. Birds are generally much envied, perhaps because they do not tell us their troubles; they only sing sweet lyrics, odes, and pæans, never elegies. Who says that the song of the nightingale is sad? To me it is tender and triumphant, but not sorrowful. And, as to the dying swan, who ever heard it out of poetry? Birds hide to die, and they die in silence, fulfilling that pitiless law in any dark hole or corner which Nature will yield. All we know of them is their freedom and their joy; they sing, they love, and they have got wings. Surely there never was such an epitome of all the delights which life can yield! Music is sweet, love is sweeter, and liberty is sweeter than all. What must it be, then, to have the three gifts combined?

I do not know what put these thoughts into my head as I sat listening to a blackbird. I liked painting better than music, with love I had little to do, and liberty was not, and would never be, mine. Was I not to marry James Carr on my twenty-first birthday?—I speak figuratively, of course, as to the exact day—and could I be so blind as not to know that my guardian's yoke was light as a feather, when compared with that which dear James would lay upon me?

I believe it was the first time that these thoughts came frankly and openly to me, without even an attempt at disguise. For the first time I confessed to myself that I had been too hasty in pledging my freedom away, and that, though my guardian's foresight came too late in the day, it was not ill-judged. There also came, it is true, a lurking wish that he had spoken and interfered earlier; but I checked this as treason to poor James, who could not defend and plead his own cause. And yet I did not check another thought, more dangerous by far than this one—namely, that if it had been my lot, it would have been very pleasant to have met such a lover as was Eugène Herbert. He was handsome, he was good-humored, and I felt sure that he would yet be such a man as no woman need be ashamed of. And yet not for these things did I think of him then in that light. I was quite satisfied with James's good looks, I could bear his infirmities of temper, and I could be proud of his truth and manliness, and not require from him gifts which Nature had thought fit to deny him. But it was not so easy to bear with his mistrust; and the postscript of his letter could not get out of my head. Now, whether through pride, and because he could not defy a woman to be untrue to him, whether through chivalrous confidence in the honor of the heart he had chosen, Eugène Herbert seemed to me incapable of the sort of jealousy which James had betrayed. He could feel, with a man's passion, that the dead husband of Elizabeth had been more to her than he, the living lover, could ever hope to be; but, having once placed his faith in her hand, he could no more take it back than a generous heart can pluck away the precious jewel it has given too hastily, perhaps, or too unwisely, but quite freely.

As this comparison occurred to me, I started to my feet with grief and shame, to see on what road my thoughts had been travelling. I repeat it, I was not afraid of being faithless, and I had no cause for the fear—my affection for Elizabeth would alone have been a bulwark against such treason; but thus clearly and frankly to confess to myself, as a matter of business, that I could

put another man above the man I was to marry, showed me so plainly what were my feelings toward my future husband, that I was terrified. "Ah! surely that cannot be right," I thought; and tears rushed to my eyes as I remembered poor James and his faithful love—the love of years, the love of a lifetime. "Besides, since I am pledged to him, and have no wish to break my promise," I argued, "why compare him with another man who is actually the lover of another woman?"

And this was not all. I felt innocent; but if these thoughts of mine could have been read, as in a book, by some one standing behind my shoulder, what could that reader have thought? My cheek burned at this suggestion of conscience. "And yet," I answered, with triumphant integrity, "I do not care for Mr. Herbert—no, I do not. If death were at hand, I could say it as I say it now—I like him dearly, but I do not love him."

In the great wreck which followed, I always looked back to that open confession, known to Heaven and my own heart alone, as the poor mariner may look to the floating spar that will give him life and safety. Much was lost, and lost beyond recall, but not honor; and, like Francis I., after the battle of Pavia, I could indulge in that boast. I had been foolish, imprudent, and, in some things, imprudent to folly; but, thank Heaven, I had not been dishonorable! Self-communion is not always pleasant—I had now had enough of it, I suppose, for no longer caring to question my own thoughts, I went back to the house, and to mademoiselle. I did not mean to open my whole heart to her—I could do that to none—but her firm, bright nature had something so cheering in it to me that, if she had only spoken of the weather, I should have felt the better for it. But when I entered the drawing-room, and cried out:

"Mademoiselle, what do you think? I have been wishing I were a bird!"

I was rather confused, this frank confession being uttered, to perceive that mademoiselle was not alone. She was talking to a lady in a blue bonnet, who smiled pleasantly at me from the window, where she sat in an arm-chair, with a cloud of light garments around her. I looked at her in doubt and surprise—no one ever came near us—and yet, even as I looked, I felt that this stranger was one of the pleasantest-looking women I had ever seen. She was about twenty-eight, but such a fair, slight, delicate, refined-looking creature, with light hair and light eyes, that at first sight she seemed much younger.

"Mignonne," said mademoiselle, turning to me as I stood shy and irresolute near the door, "let me introduce you to Miss Dunn."

She was going to add more, but I started as I heard the name, and exclaimed, with that deplorable want of self-control which is one of the attributes of young people reared far away from the world:

"Miss Dunn—Mr. Herbert's friend!"

The stranger laughed a low, sweet laugh, and her pale lips, as they parted, displayed teeth of pearl.

"Yes," she answered, "I am that Miss Dunn—the friend of Mr. Herbert, as you say."

Mademoiselle looked at us both in some surprise, while I stood enchanted. Never had I heard a voice like this, so clear that its tones seemed to linger on the ear like the echo of a silver bell.

"Have you seen Mr. Herbert?" I asked, eagerly; "is he well?"

But Miss Dunn shook her head in gentle denial. She had not seen Mr. Herbert for a long time, it appeared. She hoped he was well, but knew nothing about it. Mademoiselle, looking at me rather gravely, here remarked: "Miss Dunn brought me a letter from Miss Russell, with whom she is staying, Mignonne."

I sat down and said nothing, feeling rebuked. I knew that Mr. Herbert had been disinherited for a Miss Russell's sake. Miss Dunn, then, came from the enemy's camp. Her health, which was delicate, had brought her to Fontainebleau. She said she had been advised by her doctor to try forest air for a time, and she was staying in a boarding-house in our street for that purpose. She did not think, however, that she would remain long in Fontainebleau—she feared not, still she liked the look of the place so much.

"Mr. Herbert will not be long away," I remarked. "I dare say he will come back before you go."

"I hope so," she replied, gently. "I dare say we shall meet—that is to say," she added, correcting herself, "if he does not stay too long away."

"But he will be so disappointed not to see you," I urged.

She smiled kindly at my eager tone, but said nothing. I felt abashed. I also began to fear that Miss Dunn and Mr. Herbert were not such good friends as I had imagined. Yet what could make two such delightful persons differ? Prompt as thought came the answer—Love; for if love is the great blessing of this earth, it is also its apple of discord. At once I built up a little ro-

mance. I could not imagine that any woman would reject Mr. Herbert, so he must have been the hard-hearted one, and Miss Dunn his helpless victim. Was this what made her so languid and so pale, and was this what brought her to Fontainebleau? Yet she did not seem at all anxious to see him. Could it be any thing else? But this being a flash of light and common-sense, was soon dismissed, and I returned to my original impression. There was nothing stiff or formal about Miss Dunn; on being asked by mademoiselle to stay to dinner with us, she accepted quite frankly, and at once came up to my room to take off her things. She removed her bonnet—a light-blue crape butterfly thing, with forget-me-nots, and tossed it on my bed in a careless, girlish way that took ten years from her. She smoothed her fair hair, which she wore tied up behind, and falling back in curls on her white neck, and no nymph ever had so light and graceful a mien. And when, taking off her black-silk cloak, she stood before me a little frail, slender thing, near whom I looked stately, I began to think that I was the elder of the two.

Her talk, too, became quite girlish. "Oh, what a darling room you have!" she said, "and these dear birds! they actually sing under your very window. How sweet! And that sweet old gate—did you actually paint that, Miss Carr? Why, how very, very clever you are! Mr. Herbert must dote on you, he used to rave so about painting."

"Mr. Herbert is a painter," I replied.

"Oh! he is a painter now, is he?" she said, pensively; "he was a wood-carver when I saw him last. And he carved so beautifully! Do make him carve a work-box for you, Miss Carr; I am sure you can make him do what you like."

"Perhaps you can, Miss Dunn," I said, a little tartly.

"Not more than any one else," she answered, so gently that I was disarmed. "But surely you have found out that Mr. Herbert is perfectly amiable?"

"He has been very kind to me, and taken much pains to improve me in my drawing," I replied.

"He always had a taste for drawing," she resumed; "used to draw such sweet screens and fans. Does he do so still?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, he likes a change, the dear, good fellow! But his fans were so pretty! I am sorry he has given them up."

If Miss Dunn had been that imaginary reader of my heart whom I had been thinking of so

short a time ago, and had wished to lower my young hero in my imagination, she could not have done so more effectually than by such language. Gentle though he was, Eugène Herbert was essentially manly. He would step out of his path not to crush an insect; but it was impossible to look in his face and not read there that God had made him fearless. I could bear to think of his ignorance; for a savage, though ignorant, is still a man, but Eugène Herbert painting fans and carving work-boxes, and ignorant of grammar, became painfully small in my eyes. It was as if I had suddenly put on a pair of concave spectacles, through which I saw his figure shrunken and diminished like that of a pigmy. The most provoking part of all this was, that Miss Dunn would go on praising him in that style. Eugène could not merely paint fans, it seemed, he could also cut out paper charmingly, and was quite a useful sort of young man about the house.

"Does he not shoot, too?" I asked, rather vexed at all this.

Miss Dunn seemed to muse. Yes, she thought he did.

"And ride," I suggested.

"Oh! yes, Eugène could ride."

"And has he not led an Arab sort of life?" I persisted.

"He has been to Alexandria, I know," answered Miss Dunn, composedly.

I was quite bewildered.

"I am sure he told me that he visited both Egypt and Syria," I declared rather emphatically.

"Perhaps Mr. Herbert was more confidential with you than he has been with me," said Miss Dunn, in her sweetest voice and with her pleasantest smile.

This was spoken so lightly, so much in the tone of a girlish jest, that, though I looked foolish, I could not take it in good earnest, nor yet feel affronted. I only felt that we had had enough of Mr. Herbert as a subject of conversation.

His name was not mentioned at dinner; but though I could scarcely have said why or how it was, I found that during the meal we were continually talking of Mrs. Henry de Lusignan. Miss Dunn seemed to take the deepest interest in the beautiful young widow and in her child—such a position, so interesting, quite a romance of real life, you know; and when mademoiselle quietly put the subject by, she returned to it again, unaffectedly, it is true, but still as if it engrossed her.

True to my theory of a love-story, I concluded that Miss Dunn was jealous, and, though I pitied

her, I began to look upon her with less favor. Indeed, when I showed her over the little territory that encircled our home in the course of the evening, mademoiselle staying within, I thought it only kind and humane to say all I could to deprive Miss Dunn at once of any thing like hope.

"Mrs. Henry de Lusignan and I often come and sit here," I suggested, as we passed by a wooden bench shaded by a laburnum. "You cannot imagine how lovely she looks with that green around her."

But Miss Dunn's interest in Mrs. Henry de Lusignan seemed to have vanished, for she only sighed and said:

"I never see a laburnum without remembering the past—so sweet, you know."

This remark, which left me in doubt as to which of the two was sweet, the past or a laburnum, I treasured, but also ignored; for I persisted:

"I wish I could show you a portrait of Elizabeth—I always call her so—she is so grand, and yet so lovely!"

Miss Dunn looked dreamily before her, and said "Ah!" but went back to her laburnum.

"I think it was under a laburnum he made me sit when he sketched me—I mean Mr. Herbert. Did he sketch you under a laburnum, too?" she added, suddenly turning upon me, with inquiry in her blue eyes.

I was so disconcerted at this unexpected attack that I could only stammer:

"No, it was among the rocks."

"Ah! among the rocks," said Miss Dunn, with a significant smile. "Poor dear fellow! he will always be at it; and his sketches are like, though so horrid. He made me a perfect fright, with that yellow laburnum-tree as a background!"

And she laughed so girlishly and merrily at the remembrance that I laughed too, though not very cordially.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. DE LUSIGNAN came back the next morning. I found him in the dining-room when I went down, and started back as our looks met. His face was haggard and worn, and there was written deep upon it a settled gloom, a meaning of bitter and anxious thought, which showed that neither the purpose nor the result of his journey had been of a pleasant nature. I stood in some doubt before him, stammering a welcome which he did not heed.

"Any news, Bessie?" he asked.

"Mrs. Henry is not yet come back," I answered.

By the way in which he heard me, it was plain my guardian was aware of the fact, but it was plain too he attached no importance to it. The journey of Elizabeth bore no other meaning for him than the light and frivolous motive she had chosen to give it.

"Harry is very well," I pursued.

His face brightened.

"Yes, he is—I have seen the little fellow; he looks wonderfully well. By-the-way, what lady is that he talks about?"

I should have preferred not speaking of Miss Dunn, but, since that could not be, I thought it best to be cool and careless.

"Oh, that is Miss Dunn," I said, quietly.

"And who is Miss Dunn?" he asked, impatiently.

I have never been able to avoid being pushed in a corner, and of course, once I am there, I must needs surrender at discretion. I therefore gave my guardian an account of Miss Dunn, in which, thanks to a few pertinent questions, nothing was omitted. Mr. de Lusignan heard me with marked attention, but when I had no more to tell, turned from me with a careless "Oh! that is Miss Dunn, is it?" which was wholly at variance with the meaning of his face. I looked at him, and was but half deceived.

"And what does Mr. Herbert say to Miss Dunn?" he asked, turning his back to me, and looking out of the window into the court as he put the question.

"He has not seen her yet," I replied; and I did not tell him that Mr. Herbert was gone. Perhaps he would have thought nothing of that journey, but then I did.

Mr. de Lusignan had an opportunity of coming to conclusions of his own with regard to Miss Dunn that same afternoon. She called upon us in a pleasant, friendly way, and was delightfully girlish and naïve. Mr. de Lusignan was present. He did not say much, but leaned back in his chair with a curious smile flitting on his dark face. I have quite forgotten Miss Dunn's little speeches this day, but not the impression they produced upon me. Her few allusions to Eugène Herbert were in keeping with all she had said to me. She spoke of him most kindly, but somehow or other it was impossible to think very well of him after hearing her. Mr. de Lusignan summed up Miss Dunn's comments by saying, in the cool, contemptuous tone of a man of the world:

"Yes, he is very handsome, and there is no sort of harm in him."

"Oh, not a bit," she said, eagerly, as if she were anxious to convince herself, and Mr. de Lusignan, too, of a doubtful fact.

Mademoiselle, who had been very silent—I remembered later how silent she was about this time—now spoke:

"Mr. Herbert is not harmless," she said, quietly; "but the dangerous element in him is kept down by a rare virtue—magnanimity."

"Dangerous, and yet magnanimous," said Mr. de Lusignan, thrusting forth his nether lip—"a rare combination, as you say.—I hope you will stay to dinner with us, Miss Dunn?"

This invitation came like cold water on mademoiselle's protest. What availed it that she called Eugène Herbert dangerous and magnanimous, when Mr. de Lusignan pooh-poohed him by asking Miss Dunn to sit at our dinner-table? But it appeared that she could not do so; she had an engagement, and left us to keep it.

"Pleasant, but rather gray," said my guardian, as the door closed upon her. "How do you like her, Mignonne?"

"I think she has a delicious voice, sir," I answered, guardedly. (I did not like Miss Dunn at all, but would not say so.)

"Ye-es, but rather in the harmonica style—'a clear and cool voice.'" Then he added, suddenly: "Mrs. Henry de Lusignan is not writing; I dare say she will come back shortly. I wonder if we shall see her to-day?—do you know, I rather expect her."

He rose and walked about the drawing-room, whistling softly. It seemed to me as if he wanted to shun every thing like a conversation, by thus changing from one theme to another.

"Mignonne, you have not been out to-day," said mademoiselle, looking at me kindly; "why not go to the Jardin Anglais with Harry?"

"Watkins has a headache," I answered.

"What about it?" sharply said Mr. de Lusignan, between whom and Watkins there was an old feud, and who never let an opportunity escape of damaging the authority of that potentate. "Let Hermanee go with Bessie."

The word "let" was uttered in the tone of a command, yet I ventured on a remonstrance, which only made matters worse. I stammered something about Watkins not liking to trust Harry with Hermanee. My guardian turned upon me sharply, and said, very sourly:

"The liking of Watkins in *that* matter is of very little consequence, Bessie."

I did not care for the walk which mademoiselle had proposed in her kindness, but I submitted to the course laid down for me by going out at once.

Moral courage in small things has never been my attribute. I find cowardice both comfortable and easy; I never cut or untie the Gordian noose of small difficulties, but slip through it as well as I can. I now managed to leave the house so quietly—by sending out Hermance first—that poor Watkins never suspected my intention, and stayed up in her room, bathing her hot forehead with vinegar-and-water, fondly thinking that Harry and I were playing in the gravelled court all the time. My heart beat till I got out into the street with the child; but, once I was there, I felt safe, and got brave—not to say reckless."

The Jardin Anglais was very cool and green at this hour. I still seem to see the clear blue of that summer sky which I saw then; the golden glow of that summer sun which shone over all with the mellow light of afternoon. There is, facing the old palace, an open space, through which the eye gets a wide glimpse of the forest; it is called the Perspective. There are wilder and more beautiful spots than this, but few that ever charmed me so much. A sudden longing for the wildness and freedom of the rocky waste before me woke in my heart as I looked at it.

"Hermance, we are going there," I said; and Hermance, nothing loath, followed me.

We left the precincts of the garden, and soon reached that little desert; and, as we stood among its rocks, and within the long shadows of its pines and oaks, the spot we had left behind us looked like a picture in a fairy-tale, for there stood the old palace in the setting sun, and the waters of the little lake in front shone like silver and gold, and the pavilion which rises in the centre was fit for an enchanted princess to sleep in, and the tall trees that framed the picture on either side seemed as if they would nod over her slumbers, while the greensward in front was the very thing for such dainty feet as enchanted princesses have, or should have.

"Mademoiselle, there are vipers in these rocks," prudently said Hermance.

"Stay there with Harry by the road," I replied. "I must walk a little here."

I did not believe in vipers then, which was a mistake of mine, for I have found them to be both real and figurative since those days. So, reckless of the protests of Hermance, I followed a thread-like path that wound through the broom and heather, and felt a delightful sense of solitude creeping over me. A road, and several paths, cross the Perspective. As I reached one of these a man suddenly emerged from the shadow of the trees. I could scarcely believe my eyes—it was Mr. Herbert who stood before me.

But, after all, it was not so surprising that he should have returned; and, on surprise, joy quickly followed. In the eagerness of my feelings, I hurried up to him.

"Oh! what a shame! I am so glad! How long have you been back?" I cried in a breath.

He smiled in my face, and looked well pleased.

"I came back an hour ago," he answered; "and if you are glad, so am I. But, pray, what is a shame?"

"Oh! nothing, since you only came back an hour ago. How lucky to meet so!"

"I am not sure it was chance brought me here," he answered, frankly. "I had a hope—not a false one, you see—that I might catch a glimpse of you in the Jardin Anglais."

I know I ought not to have stayed talking there with Mr. Herbert, but the temptation proved too strong for my fortitude. Almost involuntarily I turned my back to the road, and walked through the broom and heather, above which a rock lifted its gray head here and there. The sun was setting behind us. The palace, the large pond, the green garden, were already sleeping in cool shadow; but the forest on either hand, and the long stretch of land before us, were all burning in the red sunset glow. The scene was both calm and splendid; and, save for Eugène and me, very lonely. It did not strike me then, though I remembered it later, that my companion was rather silent, and asked me for no news. I was full of the information I had to give, and the questions I wished to put, and I burst into my subject at once.

"Who do you think is here?" I said, triumphantly. "Ah! you would never guess, so I may as well tell you—Miss Dunn is in Fontainebleau."

He stood still and looked at me.

"Jessie!" he said—"Jessie Dunn is here?"

"Yes," I answered. "Is her name Jessie, then? It is a pretty name; and she is a very charming person, Mr. Herbert."

"You noticed her voice?" he replied. "Is it not sweet?"

"More than sweet—it is delicious."

He smiled; but added not another word. I was too open and too impetuous in those days to resist the impulse which made me say, "Mr. Herbert, are not you and Miss Dunn friends?"

"Very good friends," he answered, composedly. "We never exchanged one unpleasant word; and we were a good deal together at one time."

This did not seem a very satisfactory definition of friendship. I persisted, and said again:

"Well, but are you not friends?"

He answered my question with another.

"Do you think as well of me as you did before Miss Dunn came?"

"Of course I do." I tried to speak stoutly, but did not.

"No, Bessie, you do not. In some way or other, no matter which, I have been lowered in your opinion."

I could not deny it. The fans, the carving, and the rest, all came back to me with irresistible force.

"Then you are enemies?" I said.

"Did I not tell you that we were friends, very good friends?—only, you see, Miss Dunn is the cool shadow that is always coming in between me and the sun of my other friends' liking."

"And what do you do?" I exclaimed, indignantly. "Do you let that shadow come so as it pleases?—and do you do nothing?"

"Nothing, as you say."

"And when Elizabeth comes back, will you let Miss Dunn have her way still?"

I thought to touch him to the quick, but I did not.

"She is a woman," he replied.

"What about it?"

He had plucked a blue-bell, and lightly hitting my bare hand with it, he said, as I shrank from the touch, though slight:

"Do you now feel the truth of the Eastern proverb—'Strike not a woman, not even with a flower?'"

I stood rebuked before him, with tears in my eyes at his tender and chivalrous generosity.

"I hate Miss Dunn!" I exclaimed.

"Do you, Miss Carr?—well, I do not love her, you may be sure. I have reason to think that she urged my mother, over whom she had some influence, to a course which cost me Hanvil; or, to speak more intelligibly, which induced my cousin, Mr. Hanvil, to bestow his inheritance on a distant relation of his wife's, in preference to me. That was ten years ago. I was but a boy, but I had displeased her unconsciously, and Miss Dunn is not the woman to forgive a wrong. From that day to this she has tried to injure me with my mother—with every friend I had. If she left Miss Russell my successful rival in the Hanvil inheritance, and came here, it must be to do me some injury. She began with you, and lowered me in your opinion, and yet I wonder how. What did she say of me? No harm, I know—only, how did she do it?"

"She said you painted fans and carved boxes," I stammered, in tears; "and—and I am sure now it is not true."

He looked at me in the greatest amazement.

"But it is true," he said. "I painted a fan for my mother once, and I also carved her a work-box. Surely you did not think less of me for that?"

I wonder if, among the gifts which fairies used to grant, that of recalling foolish words was ever numbered? His surprise was so genuine that I stood before him burning with shame and mortification. For how could I tell him why it was that these things had so vexed me? How could I say, "You are my young hero, my Apollo, my Hypolitus, my embodiment of all manliness, and I cannot endure that you should stoop to any thing weak and womanish?" The worst, too, was that, when he said so frankly that he had painted a fan for his mother, and carved her a work-box, I could no longer look on these things as I had looked on them when mentioned by Miss Dunn.

"How stupid you must think me!" I cried, stamping my foot with vexation—"how dreadfully stupid!"

"Oh, no!" he answered, smiling—"I only think Miss Dunn very clever. And now," he added, kindly, "let us talk of something else."

"Elizabeth is not come back yet," I said, a little hesitatingly. He did not answer. "I suppose you have heard from her?" I could not help remarking.

"Oh! no, she never writes to me."

There was a pause. He resumed:

"I saw her in London, but she did not see me."

"In London!"

"Yes; I had business there, and the same business took her, I suppose, for we met in the same place, and, I have every reason to believe, on the same errand."

It was impossible to mistake his tone and manner. He spoke of Elizabeth as he might speak of any one else, as calmly as dispassionately.

"Am I to mention to her that you saw her?" I asked.

"No, it would vex her."

"Perhaps she will tell you herself."

"Oh! no, she will not."

I was utterly puzzled. I longed to question further, and I dared not. Still I ventured to say: "Is there any thing amiss between you?"

"Do not ask," he said, in a low tone, and with downcast eyes. "I cannot tell you all, and I like you far too well to tell you half. But in one sense there is nothing amiss between us. Oh, nothing. Only, there always flowed a little stream between her and me—a mere silver thread

of water, which it seemed such child's-play to step over, that it was never worth while to try. Strange error!—that stream became a river, and is now a broad, deep sea, with heavy waves rolling over treacherous breakers; and who shall dare to cross it—who shall dare?"

"You will!" I cried, with sudden ardor—"you will, for you are brave, Mr. Herbert."

But his sad, grave face did not brighten as he heard me.

"It is not daring—it is not courage that will help a man to cross that sea," he answered; "it is something which I gave once, but now can give no more."

My heart fell to hear him.

"And now let us talk of other things," he resumed, with a total change of manner. "Tell me about your drawing."

But speech, free, happy speech, does not come thus at our bidding. I felt sad and ill at ease. I found nothing to say, and when the palace clock struck the hour, I was glad of the release, and for once glad to leave him, and join Hermance who stood waiting for me, looking most demure.

This was to be a day of surprises. When we reached home, and I ran up to my room, I started back to see Elizabeth sitting in my chair by the window. She was leaning back, with her two arms thrown over her head, in an attitude of strange weariness and languor. A book—my sketch-book—lay open on her lap, but her face was partly turned to the light, and her eyes—how dark and sunken they looked!—were fastened on the pale evening sky with the saddest gaze. She was so worn, so altered, that I ran up to her, and taking her in my arms, exclaimed, eagerly:

"Elizabeth, have you been ill?"

"Very ill," she answered, in a low tone—"very ill, Bessie."

"What was it, darling?—fever?"

"Yes, the fever of hope, ending in despair, Bessie." And, laying her hand on my shoulder, she sobbed pitifully. What consolation is there for the sorrow we cannot understand?

"O Elizabeth, Elizabeth!" I could not help saying, "what is all this?"

"Misery! misery!" she replied, drawing back from me, and speaking most drearily. "I have had the gates of heaven open to me and shut again—that is all! And now," she added, with a sudden change of manner, "while we dress for dinner, tell me about that Miss Dunn."

That versatility was not in my power, and it was not without subduing a little shock of sur-

prise that I answered: "Miss Dunn? How do you know about Miss Dunn?"

"My dear Bessie," she said, pettishly, "Mr. de Lusignan has been wearying me with her praises ever since I came back, which was five minutes after you had left with Harry."

"Why, to be sure, you have not seen Harry yet!" I cried.

I was turning to the door to fetch the child. Elizabeth stopped me.

"Don't," she said, shortly. "I shall have plenty of the little monkey by-and-by. I know he is well. That will do."

This was another shock, acting somewhat like cold water; but Elizabeth was so. A strange hardness would and did mingle with her deepest and most tender feelings. She spoke as she felt then; for the time being she neither wanted to see her child nor yet to hear about him. She knew that he was well, and the knowledge sufficed her. She at once returned to Miss Dunn. I suppose I answered her rather coldly, for she asked, almost sharply:

"Are you reluctant to talk about her?"

"Oh! dear, no," I replied, eagerly. "She came the other day with a letter from a Miss Russell, who got Mr. Herbert's inheritance, and she—Miss Dunn, I mean—is related to his mother's companion, and so they have known each other for years."

I thought this enough; but Elizabeth, who had risen, and was settling her hair before the looking-glass on my toilet-table, looked round over her shoulder, and said, coolly:

"I have known this, and a good deal more, for ages. What I want is your impression of Miss Dunn."

"Oh! she is a very agreeable person, and has a lovely voice."

"And you like her?" added Elizabeth, pinning up a loose tress of her brown hair.

I could not bear the imputation.

"Like her?" exclaimed I, in hot indignation. "I detest her!"

My vehemence took Elizabeth by surprise. I volunteered an explanation.

"She is so treacherous," I said.

"To you, Bessie?"

"No, to Mr. Herbert."

"My dear, Miss Dunn began looking out for a rich husband ten years ago, and, though Mr. Herbert was but a boy then, she thought *he* would do. He never found it out, of course, but his mother did, and got very angry; and Miss Dunn managed to be revenged upon both, and has hated Mr. Herbert ever since—because, you see,

she has not got the rich husband yet, poor thing, so, pray, do not be too hard upon her! He can take care of himself, depend upon it."

"I do not want to take care of Mr. Herbert, Elizabeth, but I detest Miss Dunn."

"How do you manage to detest any one, Bessie?" asked Elizabeth. "How youthful you must still be, and how I envy you!"

She laid her hand on my shoulder, and looked down on me as an ancient Sibyl, who has been pouring forth sad oracles for centuries, may look at a youthful neophyte. One is wearied with gazing through the dreary mists that veil the future from the gaze of men, and the other has scarcely begun to write the words of doom on those oak-leaves which the wind of time is to bear away. Youth is touchy of its knowledge of life. It resents the imputation of inexperience like a wrong. I felt vexed, and I showed it.

"Do you detest no one?" I asked, petulantly.

"Not a soul," she answered, languidly.

"Not even Mr. de Lusignan?"

The little hand still resting on my shoulder shivered, the young cheek of the head that was turned toward me became deadly white, the deep-blue eyes grew deeper still.

"I hate him," she said, under her breath, "oh, how I hate him!" And she clasped her hands and knit her fine, dark eyebrows, and looked beautiful still. I was shocked. I stammered an apology, which Elizabeth did not seem to heed, but which she heard, for she answered it.

"Oh, never mind!—you had a right to remind me of it. It is my fault—I should never have told you, and then you could not remind me of it."

I heard her with contrition and dismay. This was the first (to my knowledge) of the many slight links which one after another were broken between us two about this time, till later the fine chain, that had once bound us so lovingly, snapped asunder, and we were parted forever.

"And so you detest Miss Dunn?" resumed Elizabeth, in her natural tone, "because she is treacherous to Mr. Herbert; and pray how is she treacherous?"

I would rather not have answered, but Elizabeth was pertinacious. I had to tell her about the screens, the fans, and the work-boxes. She laughed merrily, and clapped her hands on hearing me.

"I declare he shall paint me a pair of screens, a fan, and make me a work-box at once!" she cried; "at once—at once!"

She looked as full of glee as a child, and by no means seemed to think less of her lover for

these accomplishments which had so annoyed me.

"And now," she resumed, turning back to the glass, and giving her hair a last touch, "I do think it is time to go down, don't you?"

Before I could answer, my room-door opened, and Harry appeared in the arms of Watkins, whom he was kicking violently, while he screamed at the pitch of his little, shrill voice, "O ma, ma—dear ma!"

And now I saw what pathos there is in a child's voice for a mother's heart. Elizabeth's lips quivered with emotion as the boy, whom she had so coldly refused to see, sprang toward her; and when she took him up in her arms and smothered him with kisses, "Oh, my darling—my poor darling!" broke from her with so low and passionate a cry that I wished myself away. But the transport did not last. She put the child down, and, hushing him with a fond smile, and a raised forefinger, she turned to me, saying, quietly: "We must be five minutes late for dinner. Mr. de Lusignan will never forgive us."

We were ten minutes late, but Mr. de Lusignan smiled none the less graciously on his handsome daughter-in-law, and was delightfully amiable during the whole of dinner-time. It was only when dessert was over that he said:

"I hope you were very unhappy while you were away, signora mia, and are as happy to be back with us as we are to have you?"

"I am never unhappy in Paris," replied Elizabeth, very cool and careless.

"And I was, as usual, miserable in London," said my guardian, with studied carelessness.

"You have been to London?"

"Yes, I was there a few days ago."

It was impossible to know from the calm face of Elizabeth how she felt as she heard this. I saw my guardian turn his look away from her with a baffled meaning which one rarely read on his dark, worldly face. She was assuredly a strange creature, as strong and as cold, when she chose, as a grand marble statue. She showed no sort of emotion on thus learning that she and my guardian had been in the same city at the same time; and she was as impassive when she learned from me, half an hour later, that Mr. Herbert had been there, too, while she was away. When dinner was over, we went out together in the garden, as usual, and walked slowly arm-in-arm under the pleasant summer shade of the young trees.

"You do not ask about Mr. Herbert?" I said.

"Is he not well?"

"Oh! quite well. He has just returned from London."

My eyes were studiously bent on the ground. I had no wish to scan her face.

"Do look at that stupid cloud," she said. I could not but raise my eyes, and look at the sky, where an oddly-shaped cloud was hanging exactly over a young poplar-tree—"like a dot over an i," remarked Elizabeth.

My eyes could not help seeking her face. It expressed nothing but a sort of careless wonder at a vagary of Nature. To learn that her lover and her father-in-law had both visited the city her journey to which she so carefully concealed, could not make one of her handsome features quiver. She remained impassible and impenetrable. That power of self-control which is one of the gifts of life to age, and which youth, unles through the stern discipline of suffering and sorrow, can never attain, was hers in a rare degree.

"What took Mr. Herbert to London?" she asked, coming down from her cloud, and speaking rather suddenly.

"I don't know."

"I thought he told you every thing. When did he come back?"

"To-day, I believe."

"So you have been alone all this time—no drawing, no Mr. Herbert. What a blessing Miss Dunn must have been!"

She spoke with sufficient irony, but I could not protest. A sound of steps behind made me turn round, and I saw Mademoiselle Aubrey and Miss Dunn coming toward us. I learned later that mademoiselle, who was unwell, and whose grave, not to say sad looks, had struck me during dinner-time, would have preferred staying within; but Miss Dunn, spite her languid ways, had a dull sort of pertinacity, which often prevailed over wills stronger than her own. She had so dwelt on the beauty of the evening, on her regret at preventing mademoiselle from enjoying the garden, that, though not deceived, mademoiselle yielded, and brought her out to us. The pretence of her call was to put some question to Mr. de Lusignan, who was out; and her real motive certainly was to see Elizabeth.

Self-possessed though Miss Dunn was, she gave a little start as she stood face to face with Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law. I fancied that these two had met before; and later I learned that the impression was a correct one; but, then, neither gave a sign of previous acquaintance. Mademoiselle introduced our visitor to Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, then sat down wearily on a garden-chair, and looked sadly—oh! so sadly—straight before her. And now I

was all ears and all eyes for what should follow. Miss Dunn lost no time. Before five minutes were over, she was at Mr. Herbert. I looked eagerly at Elizabeth—I expected a retort to fall from her lips with avenging swiftness; but she only looked gravely at Miss Dunn, and listened to her attentively, without uttering one word. The effect of that cool, disparaging silence was crushing. Miss Dunn did not succumb without a struggle—she hovered a few minutes about her subject, as a moth may hover about a candle, and with the same result. If I had wished to take lessons in the subtle art of depreciating without censure, without even the use of a sneer, Miss Dunn now gave me an admirable opportunity to do so; but if I had also wished to see how such attempts are defeated, I had only to look at Elizabeth. How can I ever give in words the strange effect of her grave coolness? It was as if a modern Medusa, with a blooming instead of a marble face, were petrifying Miss Dunn. The words fell weakly from her lips—her looks, her very gestures, became uncertain; she tried to resist, and the effort only rendered her defeat more signal and entire; and, to add to her confusion, she underwent this humiliation in the presence of two attentive lookers-on—mademoiselle and myself.

"O Elizabeth, how beautifully you did it!" I exclaimed, when we were once more alone.

"Did what?" she asked, with an affectation of surprise.

"Settled Miss Dunn, of course."

Elizabeth yawned, and looked languid.

"Did I settle her? Pray tell me about what?"

"About Mr. Herbert. You avenged him, Elizabeth?"

Her face darkened, her fine brows were knit, her dainty lips curled, and with superb disdain she said:

"Does Mr. Herbert need a woman to avenge him?"

"Why not?—since he is too generous to resent the wrong inflicted by a woman."

"My dear Bessie, you speak in riddles."

In my simplicity I told her every word that had passed between myself and Mr. Herbert about Miss Dunn. She heard me with quiet indifference, but, when I ceased speaking, she said:

"How intimate and confidential Mr. Herbert and you are, Bessie!" And she said it in a tone so cool and strange that I stood dumb and confounded before her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. HERBERT and I had made no appointment for a drawing-lesson; besides, mademoiselle was far too languid and unwell to go out, so the next two days I spent at home. For those two days Elizabeth no more mentioned the name of Mr. Herbert than if he had never existed; and when I once ventured on the theme, she turned pettishly away, saying, with cool disdain:

"I wonder you do not see I am sick of Mr. Herbert."

And yet that same evening, with one of those sudden revulsions of temper to which I was getting accustomed from her, she said, abruptly:

"Let us go out, this place is stifling; besides, I want to see Mr. Herbert."

It was the first time that my beautiful friend was so candid with me. I made no comment, but obeyed. We went out into the forest at the end of the Rue Royale, and walked toward the obelisk. When we reached it, Elizabeth, looking toward the distant Perspective, remarked:

"I suppose that is where you and Mr. Herbert meet."

"Meet?" I repeated, rather gravely; "met once, Elizabeth. I never met him there before."

"Oh! dear, dear," she exclaimed, with a gay laugh, "is Bessie getting touchy? Why, I declare, here he is coming to meet us—as if by appointment!"

I dreaded the interview. I felt that a sort of antagonism had grown up between these two, and I feared especially that Elizabeth would pour out on her lover some of that scorn of which she was getting rather unsparing to me. I was quite mistaken. No April day was ever more liable to change than her temper. She now went toward him with bright face and outstretched hand, looking so genuinely glad to see him again, that my very heart was touched and filled with joy for him.

But how is it that the things of this world are ever incomplete, as if human beings were bound to mar their own handiwork? When hearts are ready to join, hands are divided; when tempers agree, minds differ irreconcilably; and so it is ever, and that jarring note which makes such sad discord in the music of life, is heard loud and piercing above the sweetest sounds. That note now came from Mr. Herbert.

"Well, and how are you?" gayly said Elizabeth; and how young and gay her voice could be when she chose! And how frankly her little hand, in its dainty glove of pale gray—and what perfect gloves she always had, how wonderfully

they fitted, being neither painfully tight nor ungracefully loose—was laid in his! For the first time, in my presence at least, he raised that gloved hand to his lips, looking at her the while with a grave tenderness which, as I learned later, was that of a last farewell.

"I am well," he answered; "and how are you?" But he did not ask: "Has your journey been fortunate? have you been well? how long have you been back?" That seal was on his lips which in love or in friendship is the sure token of estrangement. But Elizabeth could never bear defeat of any kind. She looked steadily in his face and said:

"I am well enough. So you, too, have been away, and to London of all places!"

"Yes, to London," he answered; "it is almost the only place I need go to."

But he added not another word on the subject. I felt strangely ill at ease. We had been walking toward the Perspective, and now reached it. Elizabeth and Mr. Herbert entered it, and I purposely lingered behind, gathering wild-flowers. They walked on side by side before me, talking in apparent friendliness; yet when they both turned back and joined me, the cheek of Elizabeth was flushed with more than its usual bloom, and there was an angry sparkle in her blue eyes. There seemed nothing unfriendly in their parting at the garden-gates, but scarcely had we walked five minutes when the temper of Elizabeth was vented upon me.

"I wish you would not stare so," she said, impetuously; "if there be a thing I detest, it is to be stared at!"

"I was not staring at you," I stammered, very much frightened at her angry look and tone. "Oh! indeed I was not."

My alarmed denial calmed her at once. She burst out laughing, and yet the laugh did not seem natural or true. There was an hysterical tone in it that struck me.

"I declare I have terrified you," she said; "but then," she pettishly added, "I do so detest being stared at."

She gave me no other apology. My heart was very full. An unkind word is hard to bear when we feel that we have deserved no unkindness. But this was only the prelude, the worst was coming. We had reached the middle of the gardens, and were quite alone. Elizabeth, standing still, said very sharply: "Can you tell me what took Mr. Herbert to London?"

She had already put that question to me, and I had been unable to answer it, but I said simply: "No, Elizabeth, I cannot."

"How odd!—for *you* are quite in his confidence, are you not?"

There was no mistaking her tone. It was both bitter and derisive. My spirit was roused, and I retorted:

"I am no more in his confidence than I am in yours, Elizabeth. He tells me nothing—no more than you do."

She felt the force of my answer, for she was silent for a while; then said, rather sadly, "Thank you, Bessie."

It is my misfortune that I cannot bear malice—that the first kind and sorrowful word reaches my heart, and strangles even the most legitimate resentment in its birth. Her tone melted me at once. It was almost humbly that I said:

"I meant no harm, Elizabeth; but, indeed, Mr. Herbert does not tell me his business."

"Nor his feelings," she said, dryly.

I was dumfounded. There never was a more uncandid enemy. Scarcely did I lay myself bare to attack when the home-thrust came, and one which it was beyond my power to parry; for the lover of Elizabeth did tell me his feelings. I could not answer her one word. I felt choking, and walked by her side full of sorrow. Presently her hand sought mine.

"I know I am so cross!" she said, deprecatingly, and with the softest look; "but you must confess, Bessie, that Mr. Herbert was provokingly mysterious this evening. He is altered—you must see that."

"I was not with you, Elizabeth," I replied, gravely. "I thought that, as you and he had not met for some days, you might—"

"What?" she interrupted, with provoking inconsistency; "you know I never have any thing to say to him!"

I gave it up. I was hurt and angry, and for the first time I felt that something was going away from our friendship. Alas! it is of these somethings that the truest friendship or the fondest love is made. That cruel armor which comes to us with years—that shield of adamant which no arrow can pierce—I had not yet won in many a battle with grief and time. I was a young soldier yet, and a very tender one—one, too, who was easily pierced with the feeblest arrows ever shot by the enemy's hand. That enemy, alas! now took the shape of those who were most dear to me.

After a sleepless night, spent in wondering how and why I had offended Elizabeth, I woke sad and unrefreshed, and much perplexed. She spared me any difficulty in the regulation of my behavior to her by staying in her room the best

part of the day. I, too, remained in mine, and was there brooding somewhat sadly over my wrongs, when, a little before dinner, Hermance tapped at the door, and asked to speak to me. She looked very mysterious, and closed the door carefully after her, before she unsealed her lips.

"A gentleman asks to speak to mademoiselle," she said; "a young English gentleman."

"You mean Mr. Herbert."

"Oh! non, c'est un autre."

I reddened up to the very roots of my hair at the unconscious and innocent impertinence of the words. Did Hermance mean that I had a supply of young gentlemen? But on annoyance quickly followed fear.

"Is that—that gentleman rather red-haired?" I asked.

"Oh! so red!" eagerly answered Hermance.

So James Carr had come at last. The thought of avoiding the impending calamity, for such it was, did not occur to me. I have already said it, I was a moral coward—one born to be thrust into a corner by a strong hand, and kept and victimized there. Instead of asking for the gentleman's name, or falling back upon my guardian or Mademoiselle Aubrey, I went down to execution.

Yes, it was James Carr who was standing there on the middle of the drawing-room floor; and a look at his face told me that the lion was raging, and the lamb fast asleep. Fear robbed me of all presence of mind.

"O James!" I cried, "what will Mr. de Lusignan say?"

This was not an affectionate greeting, I confess it. Seeing my cousin's brows meet, and his lip quiver, I hurried up to him with outstretched hands, and said, eagerly:

"O James, I am so glad to see you!"—and glad I was, after a fashion—"but what will Mr. de Lusignan say, you know?"

"I suppose the language of my looks was more friendly than that of my tongue, or that my presence had a charm of its own, for, looking at me with involuntary softness, and taking my hands in both of his, James said, very gently:

"It is all right, Bessie. I took this long journey to see you, but, when I arrived here this morning, I wrote a line to your guardian, telling him so, but also that I would look at you from a distance, and go back again, unless he allowed me to have a talk with you, and—and Bessie, he answered me very kindly, and I am dining here to-day."

"Oh, then it is all right?" I exclaimed, much relieved.

"I hope so, Bessie," and he squeezed my hands till they ached again.

Who knows but it might have been all right, for James was going to open his heart to me, if Mr. de Lusignan had not come in upon us at that very moment?

A cloud across sunshine could not have darkened the room more effectually than his presence did for us both. James dropped my hands, and I stepped back precipitately, while Mr. de Lusignan stood looking at us with sour amusement on his dark face. That meaning passed away as he came forward, and he was the man of the world once more.

"And how do you find Miss Carr looking, Mr. Carr?" asked my guardian, motioning us to be seated, and carelessly sitting down in an arm-chair, whence he surveyed us with benevolent indulgence.

James answered that I looked very well, and he said it as if my looking well under the circumstances were any thing but meritorious on my part; then he too sat down, and looked cross because the seat I took was not the nearest to his that I could find. But the position I had chosen had at least this advantage—I could see them both well. Years have gone by since that day, and yet how distinct, how vivid, is that picture even now!

The curtains were half-drawn, and a yellow gloom filled the large room. Here and there a bright gleam shot forth from a dark corner, and there were yellow streaks from the west, that crept up the gray walls, and glided along the polished oak floor, as if they did not like giving us up to obscurity. Mr. de Lusignan sat near the window, his legs crossed, his hands resting on the elbows of his chair, his head thrown back, with the light falling full on his vigorous and swarthy face. Poor James also sat in that light, and his hair looked very red, I thought, and his features had a strange expression of uneasiness and gloom. Mr. de Lusignan, on the other hand, was delightfully at his ease.

"How do you like Fontainebleau, Mr. Carr?" he asked; "but I forget, you scarcely know it yet. Well, I confess I delight in it! That old palace is charming; and I think, like the first Napoleon, that it is the best and most delightful of royal residences. By-the-way, Mr. Carr, do you believe he was descended from the Bourbons?—it looks odd, does it not?"

James stared, and being conscious of his own ignorance, and always ready to resent any hint about it, he looked inclined to let the lion loose, for a growl, at least. To avert this calamity,

and also because I really was startled at the extraordinary question put by Mr. de Lusignan, I hastened to exclaim:

"But how could Napoleon be descended from the Bourbons?"

"Oh, in the easiest way in the world," he answered, looking up at me with a twinkle in his eye. Then, letting his head fall back again: "You have heard of the Iron Mask, of course; well, then, every one knows that this mysterious gentleman was the elder brother of Louis XIV., and the rightful owner of the throne of France; every one knows that he was confined in Sainte-Marguerite; but every one does not know that the governor of the fortress was Monsieur de Bonpart, and that Mademoiselle de Bonpart (who was very pretty, I have no doubt) was privately married to the captive. A son was born to them, and he became the founder of a family which a series of events took to Corsica. There Bonpart was turned into Buonaparte. So you see that Napoleon I. was, after all, the rightful owner of the throne of France."

"Well, but is all this true?" I asked, innocently—"I mean about Monsieur de Bonpart?"

My guardian raised his hands:

"O matter of fact!" he cried.—"Mr. Carr, Bessie is a dear child, but she is more matter of fact than I can bear at times."

I was rather confused at this attack, and James stared, first at my guardian, then at me, not knowing what to make of it, when the door opened, and Elizabeth came in.

I have said it often enough in these pages. She was a beautiful woman, and beauty is, and must be, queen regnant, while the world endures. The lion in James Carr's breast was subdued at her first aspect. I read the wonder in his blue eyes, wonder on which admiration followed. I saw that he was dazzled and enchanted, and, unless I am much deceived, Elizabeth saw it, too. The flicker of a smile, something like a sunbeam, gone soon as seen, played on her dainty lips. She bowed her lovely head, and glided through Mr. de Lusignan's introduction with perfect ease and perfect grace.

"I was coming to take you out to the forest before dinner, Bessie," she said to me as she sat down between me and James Carr. "I little thought you were so pleasantly engaged."

"Oh! but why should not Mr. Carr accompany you both to the forest?" said my guardian, raising his head rather eagerly, and looking infinitely relieved at his own suggestion. "He knows nothing of Fontainebleau, and leaves tomorrow, I believe."

"To-morrow evening," corrected James; and he sighed.

Elizabeth had raised her head rather haughtily on being thus advised to escort my cousin, and act as his *cicerone*; but she softened on hearing James Carr sigh, and, wisely concluding that my lover would find better opportunities of talking to me under the shield of her presence than in the drawing-room, she said, very prettily:

"I am very fond of Fontainebleau, and I shall be so glad to show our beautiful forest to Mr. Carr."

James Carr's face beamed like sunshine on hearing this.

"I shall be most happy," he stammered, "and so thankful!"

"Then do get ready, Bessie," said Elizabeth, clapping her hands like a child. She was already as much at her ease with James as if she had known him years. "We have no time to spare, you know."

"Oh! don't hurry," graciously said my guardian. "I will give you half an hour's grace for dinner, *with pleasure!*"

His look and smile at James were both so significant that I reddened with vexation, while unconscious James looked all gratitude and happiness.

It did not take me long to get ready; it did not take us long to be in the forest, then all gold and brightness. James, walking by my side, looked overflowing with happiness, and, at the same time, as full of admiration for Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, and yet as much at his ease with her as if they were old and fast friends, of many a day's standing. It was her charm and her magic that she could thus draw hearts to her feet. They went to her as naturally as the enchanted creatures in the story of the beautiful sorceress.

The spot to which Elizabeth, who walked foremost, had taken us was by no means one of the beautiful spots of the forest, but it had a green charm of its own. The pines that grew in straight rows on either side of a little path, made a pleasant shade above us, and the mossy banks, with privet-bushes, looked so inviting that, after a while, Elizabeth, who was always tired, said we riedly:

"Oh! do let us sit down!" And so we all sat down, Elizabeth looking fixedly before her at a golden line which was passing behind the trees, her cheek resting on her hand, and the meaning of her face growing more and more vacant as she looked. I saw that she had all but forgotten us, and wondered what would come next. James,

who was looking at me very earnestly, supplied the information by remarking, abruptly:

"Why do you not talk to me of Eugène Herbert?"

I was a little startled, but soon recovered.

"I had forgotten that you and he are related, James; besides, we have so many things to talk of yet. You have not said a word to me about Kate, Susan, and Polly."

"They are well," he answered, dryly.

"Did they know you were coming?"

"No, of course not," was his short reply.

The lion was shaking his mane, and getting quite rampant.

"Did they like the little things I sent them?"

I ventured to ask, thinking that by keeping him on this theme I should be safe. Never was there a greater mistake. James's blue eyes sparkled angrily, and Elizabeth, seeing how wrong I was steering, interfered unexpectedly.

"Do tell Mr. Carr how Mr. Herbert is, Bessie."

"Oh! so well," I laughed, trying to be cool and easy.

"Did you not see him in London?" asked Elizabeth, turning to James. "He was there a few days back."

"James lives in Yorkshire," I remarked.

"I was in London all last week," he said, sharply.

I felt that the thunder-storm was coming on, and that I was destined to be its victim; still I tried to escape my fate, and turned conciliatory.

"Mr. Herbert often talks about you, James."

"Often! then you see him often?" he asked, grimly.

I told him, in some trepidation, that Mr. Herbert gave me drawing-lessons, and that of course I saw him often.

"I wonder you never wrote *that* to me," exclaimed James.

"Because you knew it," I argued. "I have been learning drawing this age past."

"From Mr. Herbert?" he said.

I looked at him half in wonder, half in grief.

"No," I replied, "not from Mr. Herbert, since I was in Kensington, and not in Fontainebleau."

"And what made you think of Mr. Herbert as a teacher?" he asked, carelessly; and my heart fell, for he began to whistle softly—so softly that I scarcely heard him.

"Mr. de Lusignan asked him," I began, "and he was so kind as to agree to give me lessons."

There was a pause.

"Is he a good teacher?" asked James.

"He paints very well."

"Yes, but is he a good teacher?"

"First rate," here remarked Elizabeth, "if we may judge by the progress his pupil has made."

This was a blow, and to this day, though Elizabeth denied it, I think for a blow it was meant. Alas! how many a gentle little hand has dealt forth sorrow, careless of the evil it might wreak!

"I wonder you did not tell me, Bessie," James remarked, with scarcely-disguised anger.

"Indeed, James," I said, piteously, "I meant no harm—indeed I did not."

"Harm!" he echoed—"you meant no harm!" And he bit his lip and glared angrily before him.

I was in agonies; I saw what was coming. I looked pitifully at Elizabeth, asking for help; but the mistrust of James had roused hers, and she looked away with studied coldness. I was defenceless between these two, and, feeling myself a poor helpless creature at bay, I burst into tears. This was my ruin. James started to his feet, and broke out in a passion of wrath which made him forget even the presence of Elizabeth.

"I was told in London," he cried, stammering in his rage, "but I could not believe it. Mr. de Lusignan said it, but I could not believe it. If I had not had it from your own lips, Bessie, I shouldn't believe it; but you have confessed it!"

I rose and went up to him.

"James," I said, "are you mad? What have I done?—what have I confessed? You must be mad! I say again, what have I done?"

James laughed in my face.

"You have made me the most wretched man under the face of Heaven!" he said, the tears starting into his eyes as he spoke; "and I only say this—pray that I may not forget my poor little sisters, and undo myself forever, for your sake, Bessie."

He was mad with jealousy, and grief and indignation kept me mute. I did not attempt to answer him; I did not follow when he walked away; I only looked after him, then said:

"O Elizabeth, why did you not say one word for me—tell him that Mr. Herbert admires you? Why did you not say something?"

"That he might repeat it at once to Mr. de Lusignan," she sharply answered. "Bessie, I never forced any concerns of mine upon you—I know life better than to do that. It was Mr. Herbert's doing, and your own—not mine. Besides, how and why is it that you could not find a word to say for yourself?" she added, turning upon me with evident suspicion.

I did not answer. It was too hard to be mis-

construed both by my lover and my friend. But Elizabeth soon veered round.

"Don't fret," she said, taking my arm and turning homeward. "I never mean half of what I say; and I dare say Mr. Carr is ashamed of himself by this, and will be quite penitent at dinner. Scold him well, and he will become humble and tractable. Depend upon it," she added, laughing, "you do not know how to manage male monsters. You are too easy, child, and cannot imagine how great are the advantages of your sex."

Her light speech could not comfort me. I was mortally afraid of James, and did not believe that he would be so quickly penitent; and yet the event proved that Elizabeth was right. When we came in to dinner, we found my cousin lounging restlessly in front of the house, and looking thoroughly humbled and cut up. I wanted to pass by him with an affectation of dignity, but he uttered so imploring a "Don't, Bessie," that I could not be obdurate.

He eagerly stretched out his hand, I allowed mine to seek his, and peace—alas! how brief, and how hollow!—was signed in the clasp. Every thing seemed smiling once more; our dinner was pleasant enough; Mademoiselle Aubrey was kind, and Mr. de Lusignan genial, and yet I felt wretched! Would Desdemona have taken Othello, I wonder, if she had known that he kept a subtle Iago in his heart, ever ready to work him to fury? The jealousy of my lover filled me with the saddest forebodings; it was more than I could bear to look such a future in the face. Twice already—and surely both times most unjustly—he had attacked me in this way, making me feel sick of life and love, and compelling me to understand the meaning of those hackneyed words "single blessedness."

It was not Miss Dunn's fault, I suppose, that she came in after dinner, and again joined us in the garden, but, alas! it was my misfortune, and the moment I saw her I felt the coming of a trouble. If she had been a witch, she could not have managed better to undo me than she did. In the first place, it was a surprise, and not an agreeable one, to see her hold out her hand to James Carr, and say, with an air of pleasant railery:

"Well, Mr. Carr, I little thought we should meet again in Fontainebleau, when we parted in Yorkshire. Were you not delightfully surprised to see Mr. Carr?" she added, addressing me in her girlish way.—"I do love a surprise above all things," she added, gushingly—"so sweet!" And Miss Dunn, leaving by her twenty-eight

years, relapsed into eighteen—not the strong, vigorous, not to say boisterous, eighteen of today, but that eighteen which was in fashion when Byron complained of blushing misses who ate bread-and-butter.

James Carr was the very man to be taken in by these ways. His ideal of woman was the innocence of imperfect English, the gentleness of blue eyes and golden locks, and if he liked me, spite of my deficiencies in these respects, it was because habit supplied all that I failed in. He could not, therefore, help looking with favor at Miss Dunn, and, I dare say, though he did not know it, he regretted that I was not more like this charming person.

I had hoped, I do not know why, that Elizabeth would have interfered, and again frozen Miss Dunn with a look, but she did not; she walked on before us, passing her lily hand through the green hawthorn-bushes, and carelessly leaving me to my fate. Miss Dunn went on as she had begun, James walking by her side, I listening; then suddenly the abyss over which she had been throwing these flowers of speech yawned at my feet. Miss Dunn had little fat hands, these she clasped with sudden vivacity, and opening her eyes, and making them very round—it was another of her childish ways—she exclaimed:

“O Miss Carr, do let me see your drawings! Mr. de Lusignan tells me you draw charmingly!”

“They are not worth showing,” I replied—“indeed they are not.”

“Then indeed they are,” here remarked my guardian, who was smoking a cigar a little behind us—“Mr. Carr must see them.”

His tone was peremptory. I turned to see his face, and there too, even in the twilight, I could read a command that was not to be heard in vain.

“But there is no light to see them by,” I argued.

“We will go in and have the lamp,” said Mr. de Lusignan, throwing away his cigar. “I told Mr. Carr that you had greatly improved under Mr. Herbert’s teaching, so I wish him to see that I have not exaggerated your progress.”

This was a long speech for my guardian, who seldom explained his intentions of any kind, and submissiveness was my only course; besides, James looking at me half-mistrustfully, half-penitently, said with his eyes, as plainly as they could speak: “I want to see those drawings; I must see them, Bessie;” so, I repeat it, submission was my only course.

We went in; two lamps were lit, my sketch-

book—it was the book of fate for me—was brought down, and its pages were displayed to James, who knew as much of drawing as I did of philology. And yet, poor fellow! how kindly, and with what friendly admiration, he looked at these sketches of mine! He was short-sighted, and had to bury his face in the pages; he held a lamp with one hand, and grasped it as tight as if it were a lance, or a sword, while his nose all but touched my rocks and trees.

“Now really, I think them very good,” he said—“really, I do.”

“They are decidedly good,” said my guardian.

“Bessie has a taste for drawing,” kindly remarked mademoiselle.

“A sweet taste,” chimed in Miss Dunn, who was peeping over James’s shoulder.

In this chorus of praise Elizabeth alone was silent.

“And that is Char—Charlemagne,” said Miss Dunn. “So you write down the names of your trees, Miss Carr?—how clever!—also the day on which you begin, and that on which you end a drawing. How very clever!”

“Now I call that really good, I do,” said James, with increasing satisfaction. “What tree is that, Bessie?—the Roger?”

“Rageur,” I corrected; “it is a very distorted tree, and looks angry, and so it has been called the Rageur.”

“Queer fellow!” said James—“like some one I know.”

“Dear me! so it is,” remarked Miss Dunn. “Who can it be? Just about these branches here there is a likeness. Good gracious! it cannot be to you, Mr. Carr!” and she laughed a pretty, silvery laugh, as sweet to hear as it was provoking.

James smiled grimly enough, and I felt myself turning crimson, especially when Miss Dunn, with an artless look of her blue eyes directed toward me, added:

“Is Mr. Carr really a *rageur*, Miss Carr?”

I paused before I answered, and during that pause James looked at me. The consciousness that the dear fellow had a temper—a temper, too, of which I was afraid—terrified me out of all presence of mind. I stared at him in stupid hesitation. I reddened; but red though I may have been, I am sure that James Carr’s cheeks were deeper in hue than mine, as he bent his eyes once more on the pages of my sketch-book. I felt the peril, for he was gnawing his nether lip, and I thought to conjure it by taking the book from him, and saying, as kindly as I could:

"Shall I show you my favorite drawing, James?"

He let me take the book. I wanted to turn to a little sketch of the pavilion of Sully, concerning which I meant to tell him (later) all the dreams I had indulged in; but that evil fortune which had decreed that my sketch-book should be a book of sorrow and contention, again stepped in, and turned the pages in my stead. Else how was it that the Pavillon de Sully remained obstinately concealed, and that my unlucky portrait appeared? Still I believe I could have avoided the danger, for no sooner did I catch a glimpse of my own face than I thrust it back unseen, as I imagined, by James, whose short-sightedness helped me wonderfully; but Miss Dunn, taking on herself the office of Dame Fortune—how often does ill-luck wear a human aspect!—eagerly checked my hand with the exclamation—

"Oh, how charming! Surely that is your portrait, Miss Carr? What a shame to want to hide it from us!—Do let me see it, Mr. Carr—it looks so sweet!"

I gave up the book to them, and stood there waiting my fate. That fate I saw gathering on James Carr's brow. It reddened as I looked, and the thick veins swelled with increasing wrath, and his lips grew white and trembled; but still I could not see his eyes; these were bent on my unlucky image, while Miss Dunn went on with a string of commentaries.

"Well, I never did see so sweet a portrait!" she said, in her silvery voice—"not by yourself, surely! Ah, no, I recognize Mr. Herbert's initials, E. H. How many sittings you must have given him, for him to be so successful!"

I replied, in sulky indignation, that I had never given him any. "Ah! then he did it from memory," calmly remarked Miss Dunn; "he learned it by heart first, then put it down on paper. How clever!" I darted the angriest look my eyes could give at the serpent, who only smiled in imperturbable coolness at me.

James took no notice of her—I fancy he had not even heard her—but, looking up, he said calmly—dreadful was that calmness to me:

"Why did you want to pass this portrait over, Bessie?"

I was confounded at the directness of the question. Before I could commit myself by an answer, Mademoiselle Aubrey kindly interfered.

"It is a first-rate portrait, is it not, Mr. Carr?"

"What is it?" asked my guardian, starting up, or pretending to start up, from a fit of mus-

ing—"oh! Mignonne's image!—it is a pretty thing," and he sank back in his chair.

Elizabeth, too, seemed inclined to let my fate drift on, for at this precise moment she rose, walked to the open window, and, leaning out, looked down on the court below. But again mademoiselle came to the rescue.

"And Mr. Herbert's sketch has the merit of having been done rapidly," she said, in her kind voice. "I believe he executed it while Mignonne and I sat waiting for the rain to cease falling—was it not so, Mignonne?"

I replied that it was so. I suppose the few minutes which had passed thus had given James time to cool, for he shut the book without a word, and rose to take his leave. And was he going—going so soon? said Mr. de Lusignan. Yes, James was going, and he shook hands with us all round twice over, poor fellow, unconscious of the smiles which this abstractedness of his created.

But I did not smile—I could not. I was miserable, and would have given much to be alone, and indulge in tears. And yet it is so pleasant and so natural to hope that, when I was alone at last in my room that evening, I tried to persuade myself that James, not having been able to vent his wrath at once, would be calm and comparatively reasonable when we met again.



CHAPTER XXVII.

"Why should not every thing be right?" I argued to myself, the next morning, as I sat on the edge of my bed dressing, and looking at the sketch-book, which lay open on the table by me. "Why should my unlucky portrait be the cause of such mischief? What is there in it?"

I took the book, and opened it at the page where Eugène Herbert had drawn my image, with a sure though careless hand. I looked at that face, so familiar and so strange, and forgetting, little by little, that it was mine, I began speculating about its probable future—if it was to have any thing like a history in the days yet to come. I do not think there was much egotism in my thoughts. I do not fancy, young though I was, that the destiny I shaped out had any thing of the romance which, even in this matter-of-fact age, is apt to creep into the fancies of the young, when their speculations turn on that lovable theme, lovable at all ages, "Self!" Virtue, self-denying, self-sacrificing, was my ideal that morning.

"I shall be so good," thought I, looking at a young face in which there was more unconscious longing for happiness than for sacrifice. "I shall be so good that I shall make James good too. He cannot help it; for I will be patient, no matter how much he may provoke me. I am sure it will not be difficult to manage him, once I am his wife. To begin with, he cannot be jealous when we are really married. That would be ridiculous, you know. Then, if he is not jealous, what need I mind his whims and fancies? If he provokes me, I shall look at him and turn away without a word; and, if he sulks, I shall call Kate or Susan to me, and pet them, so that he must relent. Then, I shall have my books, and my piano, and my drawing, and the garden, and house-keeping, and I shall be so happy—so *very* happy!"

The word happy called up a vision of a red-brick house in Yorkshire. (I had had it photographed for me, so that I knew it quite well; and dreadfully ugly I thought it, in my inmost heart.) I saw the dull front, the tall chimney-stacks, the formal garden, all flowers and no shade, a bleak northern landscape around it, and James, my lord and master, smoking his pipe by my side, while his three red-haired sisters quarrelled about nothing in the parlor. I suppose the exquisite bliss of the vision was too much for me, for, to my great surprise, I burst into tears. This fit of weeping was so sudden that I had no power of control over it. I tried to gulp down my sobs, and they would rise again and again, until I threw myself on my pillow, exclaiming, in a sort of low moan, "Oh! I wish I were dead!—I wish I were dead!" For I have heard that, when people are supremely blest, they are apt to wish that life may leave them, knowing, no doubt, that it has nothing left to bestow; that its prizes are exhausted, and only blanks left to be drawn by them, poor mortals.

As I lay thus weeping and moaning, a tap at my door roused me. I did not open, but inquired from within who was there. The shrill, high voice of Hermance answered me glibly that the Monsieur Anglais wanted mademoiselle. James wanted me, and my heart gave a great throb of quiet joy. Suppose he were going away, called off suddenly by some blessed business or other? Oh, how lucky that would be! I felt wicked, ungrateful, a wretch, unworthy to see the light of day, or breathe the air of heaven! *Cui bono?* The sense of liberation from trouble and fear was too much for the strength of my love. With an eagerness which I tried to check, as if Hermance could guess through the door that

I was glad James was going away, I answered that I would go down directly.

I hastened to dress, and drying my tears—for it would not do to let James see that I had been crying for joy—I went down. I entered the drawing-room, and found James there, standing by the marble chimney, so like a Rhadamanthus, that I felt tried, and sentenced, and executed, according to James Carr's law, the very moment I looked at him. And yet, spite the natural terror I felt, a feeling stronger than terror filled my very heart, as I looked at him—pity, yes, pity for the rage and grief which had made his face so white, his eyes so angry, and yet so dull.

I raised my hands piteously toward him. "O James! James!" I cried; and I felt stifled—I could say no more—but I had said enough.

"Yes," he answered, setting his teeth, and glaring at me, "you may well say, 'O James! James!' I never thought it would come to that—never, Bessie—never; and it has! it has! and 'tis all over!—'tis all over!" And James walked up and down the drawing-room, looking so wickedly at me, spite the pathetic words, "'Tis all over!" that pity fled, and terror, not unmixed with dislike, came in its stead. I stood looking at him, silent, afraid, and, withal, angry and sulky. James Carr, his brick house, his three red-haired sisters, his jealousy, and his bad temper, were all mixed up in one hateful vision, and became abominable in my eyes. It requires much patient love to suffer and endure jealousy, and that much James had exhausted. "Well," he said, standing still, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing," I answered, more sulkily than indignantly.

I had never spoken to James Carr in that tone before; and he stared at me. His amazement almost cooled his anger; but only for a moment.

"I came to tell you," he said, his eyes glaring again, and his lips quivering, "that after what passed last night, it is all over—I mean between us two."

"Thank you; but perhaps you will kindly tell me what passed last night, for I really know nothing about it."

I sat down and looked at him. I did not care a pin about James Carr just then—I was heartily glad to hear from his own lips that it was all over; but my spirit was roused, and to be spoken to as if I were guilty, to be looked at as if I were so conscious of my guilt that I ought not to look him in the face, was more than my pride could bear. What had I done, and who was he that things should come to such a pass between us?

James seemed astounded at my audacity; but he soon rallied.

"You know what I mean," he said, trying to speak calmly; "but you are a woman, my cousin, too, and an orphan, and so I will not say more than this: it is all over between us. You are glad, of course?"

"Delighted," was my prompt reply.

James bit his lip, and resumed:

"Have your say. I say it again—you are a girl, my cousin, and an orphan, that is enough for me. But he is not a girl, is he?" (Oh! what an idiot jealousy can turn a man into!) "And he is not an orphan either; and when he is to be found, and does not hide, as he has been hiding since I came to this place, the mean coward and vile traitor, we shall just see which is the better man of the two—that's all!"

I had the sense not to take Eugène Herbert's part. My heart leaped to hear him called a mean coward and vile traitor, but I bit my tongue and was silent; yet something of the angry scorn I felt there must have been in my eyes as their look fell upon James Carr, for he said, in a low voice:

"Don't look at me so, Bessie!—don't make me quite mad! Remember that I thought I could trust him, and that I was sure of you. And now you have confessed it. Well, well, Bessie, pray that he may not come across me—pray that he may not, Bessie, for if he should, I may forget Polly, and Kate, and Susan—I may forget that I am all they have to look to."

Poor fellow! the involuntary pathos of his voice, as he spoke of his little sisters, went to my heart. Tears rushed to my eyes, and blinded me as I looked at him. We stood close to each other now, and, seeing in him not my jealous lover, not the future husband, to live with whom was certain misery, but the cousin and friend of my childhood and my youth, I suddenly relented, and, flinging my arms around his neck, I burst into tears, and said:

"O James, James, don't break my heart!"

Life would not be what it is if men and women could feel—not after the same fashion, for that they do, but in the same way at the same time. I was thoroughly softened then; but, unluckily, James was not. Five minutes later the tenderness of our young past welled up to his heart; but, during those five minutes, the sweet waters had ebbed away out of mine, and could not come back either at my call or his. He put me away a little, and, laying his two hands on my shoulders, he looked into my face.

"Yes, you are very sorry now," he said,

sternly; "but you should have thought of that, Bessie, before you threw an honest fellow's heart away for a poor, pitiful—" here James, who was not eloquent, stammered, in search of an epithet, and came out with the unlucky one—"sneak."

I drew back from him, disgusted—angry—and yet cold as ice.

"You mistake me quite," I said, frigidly.

"Oh! yes, of course I do; but it is too late—Bessie, it is too late!"

"And so you too will find!" I cried; and I felt my eyes flashing with wrath; "it is too late, indeed, and so you will find, Mr. Carr, if ever you try to undo this morning's work."

I looked, as I felt, inexorably angry, and the moment James saw and understood that I was really lost to him, he became frantic to have me back. Wrath, jealousy, mistrust, all fled, all vanished, all melted away—he had but one thought, but one wish.

"Bessie," he cried, attempting to seize my hands, "I was mad—don't mind me, my darling, don't, don't!—I was mad, indeed I was!"

But I snatched my hands from his, and I crushed him with a look, as I said:

"You have asked to see me, and your first words, if I remember rightly, were, 'Tis all over!' Well, then, as you began I end. It is all over. You have wearied my patience, exhausted my affection, worn out my friendship. You are wrong about Mr. Herbert, from beginning to end. I could set you right with a word, and that word I will not utter. I end as you began—it is all over!"

And while he stood staring at me in mute sorrow—ah, how pitiful his eyes were!—I left the room.

I ran up to my room at once. I leaned my throbbing forehead on my hand, and looked vacantly out of the window. I saw a tree waving gently to and fro in the summer air, and on the tranquil sky, and I felt not sorrowful nor broken-hearted, but indignant and angry. What had I done to be so treated? I had been patient as any *Griselidis*; I had endured, and not complained. How had I deserved this? It was dreadful, it was cruel, and I was glad I was to be rid of so odious a tie.

"Monsieur asks mademoiselle to be so good as to come down to him."

So spoke the clear, high voice of Hermance, who had knocked at my door and opened it, thinking that I uttered an "*entrez*" which had never passed my lips.

The summons by no means pacified me. Very likely, indeed, that I should go down to James

Carr again! I looked at Hermance in a sort of scorn, and said:

"Tell Monsieur Carr that I am busy, and cannot go down."

Hermance stared.

"I beg mademoiselle's pardon," she said, "but I did not speak of Monsieur Carr. I spoke of Monsieur de Lusignan."

I calmed down at once.

"Oh! very well," I replied, in an altered tone, "I am going—going down directly."

I went, prepared to hear from my guardian a mild echo of James Carr's accusations. I had a vague feeling that he was to blame in all this; but that I should be scolded none the less was my conviction. To be innocent is not always to be safe, and I had learned it to my cost. I do not know of what sulky dignity my face may have borne the impress when I entered the drawing-room, but the flickering smile on my guardian's lips had a meaning which made me redden to the very temples. I began stammering, "You wish to speak to me, sir," which the sudden appearance of James Carr checked on my lips. He had been hidden by the heavy window-curtains, and coming forward he stood before me with his back to the fireplace, and his arms folded across his broad chest. He was very pale, his cheeks were bloodless, his eyes stared, and were downcast. His mobile lips expressed every passionate emotion, and he stood there motionless, awaiting his doom.

"My dear," said Mr. de Lusignan very kindly, "what does all this mean? I speak in a friendly way, for, having never sanctioned your engagement to Mr. Carr, I am not going to call you to an account if you break it. Still Mr. Carr is your cousin, your friend, and you seem to have differed very seriously. Now, my dear, I do not wish to meddle; but still, what does this mean?"

I longed to say to my guardian—"Since you do not wish to meddle, sir, please do not meddle at all;" but, not being able to speak so frankly—oh, how troublesome a thing is civility!—I replied, still standing—we all stood—"It is Mr. Carr's doing, not mine."

"Then you regret it," promptly remarked my guardian—"is that your meaning?"

"Bessie, you know I meant no harm," put in poor James.

"I know that you have insulted me, and that I will never have any thing to do with you again," was my impetuous reply.

"My dear, never is a long word," said my guardian—"however, that is your concern, not mine—I only wish to say this: am I to under-

stand that the engagement between you and Mr. Carr is entirely at an end?"

"Yes," I answered, "that is my meaning."

Mr. de Lusignan shrugged his shoulders, and looked at James.

"My dear sir," he said, "your case is hopeless, unless this lady should change her mind again. I cannot interfere; and you will do me the justice to confess that I have not attempted to influence her; but, so far as I can see, it is all over."

I do not think James Carr heard one word of this speech—he was staring at me in a sort of dismay, mute and pitiful, as if he had been dumb; and I did not relent, I did not soften toward him—I could not. The sense of freedom, won through no fault of mine, was too precious and too sweet to be foolishly forfeited. I looked at my guardian, who nodded, and, with a formal courtesy to James, who never stirred, I left the room.

And now indeed it was all over. If ever my guardian had wished to divide two human beings, that wish was fairly accomplished, and forever—yes, irrevocably so, forever and ever.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

No one spoke to me of James Carr when we all met at breakfast, half an hour later; but no one asked me why I neither ate nor talked. I was left to my own thoughts, such as they were. I did not repent—the hour for that had not yet come. I was not sorry for James Carr; but, on the contrary, well content that it should be his turn to suffer. Such being my mood, I noticed and construed, with some jealous mistrust, the bearing of my companions. My guardian, indeed, was just as usual, but there was no mistaking the gravity on Mademoiselle Aubrey's face, and the cool haughtiness of Elizabeth's looks. It was plain to me that these two knew what had happened; and plain, too, that they both censured me. Indeed, this was a matter on which I was not left in doubt. When we all rose, and left the breakfast-table, mademoiselle led me aside, and, taking my hand, and looking down in my face with kind seriousness, she said:

"Mignonne, your guardian tells me it is all over between your cousin and you. Have you thought of that well? Are you sure you will never repent?"

"How can I repent not being made wretched by the most jealous of men?" I asked, rather indignantly.

"But why was he jealous?" she said.

"Because it is his nature, of course."

"Mignonne, affection is exacting. Would you have liked Mr. Carr to have been as friendly with any one as you were with Mr. Herbert? I know you meant no harm, nor did he; but would you have liked it?"

I looked at mademoiselle. I could scarcely believe that my ears had not deceived me.

"If there had been any harm in my being so friendly with Mr. Herbert," I said, "would Mr. de Lusignan have allowed it?—would you not have warned me against it?"

"But did I not say there was no harm?" she replied, reddening a little. "I only said that affection is exacting, and thought that you might have been lenient toward sins which sprang from such a source."

"Affection is also trusting," I retorted. "Affection is not always ready to think evil of its object, and neither insults nor torments it."

I spoke warmly. Mademoiselle only answered me by saying: "You know best, Mignonne;" with which she left me.

This had taken place in the gravelled court in front of the house. Elizabeth walked out as mademoiselle uttered these words, and passing by us, smiled so significantly that my very heart was pierced. She was moving on—I stopped her.

"Elizabeth," I said, "you should not look so. You know that I am innocent, and that James had not the shadow of right on his side. You would not justify me to him, though a word from you could have done it. You need not do so now to any one, but still you need not look so. I have not deserved it."

I believe there were tears in my eyes; but Elizabeth looked at me very quietly, without displeasure, without anger, but still in a way that chilled me.

"No word of mine could have served you with Mr. Carr," she answered. "I could only have said that which would have injured you. I refrained from doing so. You can ask for no more."

She did not give me time to answer her, but walked on. I did not follow her. I felt too much hurt. I had not deserved this. I knew I had not, and yet I was blamed by the two whose censure was hardest to bear; and James Carr was pitied by mademoiselle, and justified by Elizabeth.

One of the saddest features of all sorrow is its loneliness. To have a grief is to be alone, in the darkest meaning of that dreary word. There never yet has been any sharing of heartache.

Our friends may come and sit with us, as his friends sat of yore with Job, and comfort us, if not after their memorable fashion, yet at least as well as they can, but it makes little difference, after all. We must suffer. I had my trouble now, a heavy one it seemed to me, and I was made to feel that I must bear it alone. My guardian had no vocation for the office of comforter, and I saw, from that first day, how the look of my woe-begone face was hateful to him, as any other face telling the same story would have been. So he shunned me.

The bearing of Elizabeth was characteristic. She ignored my trouble. For her James Carr had never existed; he had not come, he had not reproached me, he had not been jealous and angry, and he had not departed after an irretrievable breach, which left me free indeed, but very sad. Seeing her so, I too became cold and estranged.

And now how gladly would I have turned to mademoiselle for comfort or consolation! But I could not. She had been very sad for some time, but that sadness had become gravity, so far as I was concerned, from the morning on which James and I had parted. It was evident that she did not, and perhaps could not, hold me blameless. This was hard, and what rendered it harder was that every one made it a point not to mention Mr. Herbert's name. My guardian did not ask why I took no more lessons, mademoiselle never once proposed that we should go out to draw, and Elizabeth ignored the existence of her lover as completely as she ignored that of James Carr. I found this silence both depressing and ominous; it was indeed, the silence that comes before the storm.

Two entire days—alas! how heavy and tedious had seemed their hours—had passed thus, when, on the third, it so happened that I remained alone in the house. Mademoiselle had gone on a day's business to Paris, and Elizabeth had accompanied her. My guardian was out riding in the forest, and, as I said, I remained alone. I went down to the drawing-room, and, opening the piano, I played to myself. I was not a great musician, but James Carr, who had an exquisite ear, poor fellow! used to say to me:

"A fellow could listen to you forever, Bessie!"

So I could play with satisfaction to myself, and to all such listeners as do not require too much noise in music. I forget what piece I began with, but little by little old feelings and old memories stole over me, and I found myself playing those same Irish melodies which I had played

to James Carr on our last evening at Mrs. Dawson's. It was not wise of me to do so, and so I soon found. Much as James Carr had sinned, I had loved him too well to put him by easily; before five minutes were over my head I was lying on the piano, and I was crying bitterly. The sound of the opening door made me start up. I turned round, and saw Mr. Herbert standing on the threshold.

"I beg your pardon," he said, coming in, "but I thought you had done playing."

"Yes, I had done," I replied, rising. "But did not Hermance tell you they are all out?"

He did not seem to mind my rudeness. He shut the door, and, coming forward, he said:

"I call by appointment. Mr. de Lusignan has left word that I am to wait for him. I am before my time," he added, looking at his watch. And he sat down.

I sat down too, and began an interesting conversation about the weather. He did not seem inclined to follow suit, but remarked, with some abruptness:

"Will you let me say a few words to you while we are alone, Bessie? I know I should say Miss Carr," he added, correcting himself; "but it is the last time I shall sin so. I come to say good-by."

"You are going away, Mr. Herbert?"

"Yes, and I do not think you and I shall ever meet again, Miss Carr. Your road and that of Elizabeth lie together, and I saw my last of her the other evening."

He spoke very calmly, as calmly as if he and Elizabeth had been travellers who meet on the road, walk a while side by side, then part to meet no more. Spite my own grief, spite the wrong she had done me, I could not bear this.

"O Mr. Herbert," I cried, turning full upon him, and speaking with some passion, "do you love her no more? Did you ever love her, that you are so calm about it?"

My vehemence did not seem to affect him much, but he looked at me with strange earnestness. He was leaning back in his chair, his head slightly bent forward, and there was a meaning full of calm sorrow in his deep-set eyes as their look rested upon me.

"I loved a woman once," he said—"a beautiful woman, with some faults, but for all that a grand creature. I knew I had not, and never could have, her entire heart, and that her dead husband would always be more to her than the living one; but I loved her. I would have taken what was left of her liking, and prized it more than the fullest and freest affection of another

woman, if it could have been mine; but, Bessie, whatever the poets may say, love cannot survive death, and Elizabeth is dead—dead to me. I remember her very keenly still, and, though I speak so calmly, do not think me so cold as I look; for I am in my first season of lament and mourning. But, dear though my mother was, I have outlived her loss; and what I could do for the woman who bore me, who gave me her milk, her love, her kisses, and who would have given me her heart's-blood, I can do for another. Elizabeth is dead—the beautiful Elizabeth whom I so loved, surely one of the finest of God's creatures—she is dead and I must bear it."

Gentle though he was, there always was much manliness about Eugène Herbert, perhaps because his outward man was essentially manly; but now that manliness, shown in self-control so different from the weak violence of James Carr, seemed more remarkable than ever to me. I could put no question, I could make no comment on what I had heard. For some reason which he did not choose to reveal to me, Mr. Herbert had given up Elizabeth. So far as he was concerned, she existed no more, and he could bear it. He had told me once how he had left his mother well, alive, and handsome in the morning, and found her pale in death when he came home at night, and yet how he had not been able to shed one tear. In the same spirit of a sorrow both keen and strong, he now bore the loss of his love. Something as fatal as death had arisen between them: and whatever that something might be, Mr. Herbert could look it in the face without flinching. As I have said, I could make no comment, I could put no question. He did not seem to think either required from me, for, putting the subject by as completely as if it were something which I was never to read, stamping it with a seal never to be broken by me, he said:

"I was sorry that I was away when James Carr called upon me. I went to find him out this morning, but he was already gone. When you write to him—"

Instead of hearing Mr. Herbert to the end, I interrupted him.

"I shall never write to Mr. Carr again."

Eugène Herbert gave me a quick, amazed look; then, by some strange intuition for which I was not prepared, he must have guessed the truth, for he colored violently. I wished myself miles away; but rescue from the consequences of my rashness came in the sudden entrance of my guardian. I was so glad at the release that I wanted to escape at once; but, darting a quick look from Mr. Herbert to me, M. de Lusignan ut-

tered a "Don't run away, Bessie," which was not to be disobeyed.

I sat down resignedly.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Herbert," said my guardian; but, taking out his watch, and showing him the hour, "you must be fast, for I go with the sun."

Mr. Herbert bowed and smiled, and confessed that he had come before his time. The acknowledgment restored my guardian to good-humor, and, sitting down, he asked what he could do for Mr. Herbert's service. I wanted to rise, but this time it was Eugène Herbert who detained me.

"Pray stay," he said. "I have nothing to say which the whole world could not hear.—You were kind enough," he added, turning back to my guardian, "to propose some time ago showing 'A Nook in the Forest' to one of your friends, who might be inclined to purchase. Allow me to ask if he still wishes to see it?"

I was rather surprised at this, but my surprise lessened on hearing my guardian's reply.

"Well, Mr. Herbert," he said, in his kindest tones, "I am going to be desperately candid with you. My friend has seen your picture, and in the very 'nook' which you were painting. He has been one of the many passers-by who look over a painter's shoulder, stare and walk on, and, I am sorry to say it, he was not charmed. Don't misunderstand me," added Mr. de Lusignan, uplifting his hand, "he is not one of those barbarians who can detect no redeeming quality in a man's work. He was quite fascinated with some bits in your 'Nook,' 'delicious bits' he called them; there was a bluish corner of mist and distance under the trees worthy of a master, he declared; but then the whole thing wanted style—the trees wanted style, the brush-wood wanted style, the ferns wanted style; I am afraid he is a carping fellow, after all, that friend of mine, Mr. Herbert," said Mr. de Lusignan, with a gay, light laugh.

I heard him with the keenest indignation. In the first place, because I thought this censure both cruel and uncalled for; and, in the second place, because I was convinced that Mr. de Lusignan was his own friend.

"I don't like your friend, sir," I said, warmly, interfering very needlessly in the conversation; "'A Nook in the Forest' is one of the loveliest pictures I ever saw; and what does *he* mean by style?"

My guardian whistled in his amazement at this onset.

"I declare Mignonne has turned connoisseur!" he said.—"I hope you are flattered, Mr. Herbert,

at her verdict; but how shall my unhappy friend survive his condemnation?"

"I am flattered, indeed," replied Mr. Herbert, kindly; "but since I have learned that your friend thinks 'A Nook' fails in style, may I know from Miss Carr what she believes that it excels in?"

"I think," I said, with much seeming boldness, but I was rather frightened at myself, "that 'A Nook in the Forest' is beautiful on account of its great simplicity. I think it is the work of one who loved and revered Nature too much to give her 'a style.'"

"Another hit at my poor friend," plaintively remarked my guardian. "Well, Mr. Herbert, you know that, style or no style, I think well of your picture—it does you great credit, it really does, and from my heart I wish you a more enlightened purchaser than my friend would have been."

"I have got one," quietly answered Mr. Herbert; "Mr. Gray is going to buy 'A Nook in the Forest.'"

"Then, pray, why did you not say so at once?" very sharply asked Mr. de Lusignan, looking as vexed as I was delighted.

"Because, having promised that your friend should have the first chance of this picture, I would not pledge myself to Mr. Gray until I had spoken to you."

"Mr. Gray—what Mr. Gray?" asked my guardian, still speaking sharply. "Do you mean the connoisseur, Mr. Gray, of Gray's House, near Hanvil?"

"Yes, the same."

Mr. de Lusignan chafed visibly enough. He was his own friend, of course, and had had a fleeting sort of fancy for Mr. Herbert's picture; but the conviction that he could get it without difficulty had weakened his desire until it vanished; now competition roused it anew, but it was too late. His vexation was all the keener, that Mr. Gray and he were rivals in their purchases, and generally stole a march on each other.

"I did not know Mr. Gray was in Fontainebleau," he said, with evident irritation.

"He is gone," replied Mr. Herbert; "he only came to see my picture."

"Ah! by-the-way, Mr. Herbert," almost interrupted my guardian, who had had enough of the subject, "I have a piece of news for you." He took out a newspaper, and, pointing to a paragraph in it, remarked: "You see that the Spanish Galliot Company—your company—is coming out with new shares; the old ones are rising a trifle. Now is your time to sell out before the

second bubble bursts—that is to say, if you have kept your shares.”

“Every one,” answered Mr. Herbert.

“Well, then, now is your time, Mr. Herbert. Johnson, rogue the first, is gone with your guineas in his pocket; and Smithson, or Williamson, or any other ‘son,’ rogue the second, wants somebody else’s guineas. Neither you nor I can prevent that, Mr. Herbert, so you must e’en do as the French say, *tirer votre épingle du jeu*. Any thing like half, ay, or the one-tenth of what you lost, you can never get back; but an ounce of bread is better than no loaf, and you may not find a Mr. Gray at your elbow to buy your next picture.”

He had risen to show Mr. Herbert the paragraph, and stood by his chair as he said this. Mr. Herbert rose, too, and, looking him steadily in the face, he said, slowly and deliberately:

“Alexander Grant Johnson was one of the most honorable men breathing, and the truest if not the wisest friend I ever had.”

My guardian rolled his eyes in genuine amazement.

“You are not jesting?”

“I never was more in earnest,” answered Mr. Herbert, promptly.

“Why—why, my dear sir, he swindled you out of your money!” impatiently exclaimed Mr. de Lusignan—“he, a man of the world, cheated you, an inexperienced boy, in a most scandalous manner. You had a very decent property—a very decent property—and where is it now? Here you are living by your painting, and where is Johnson? In America, in Australia, no matter where, but with your guineas in his pocket, sir.”

For the first time, in my presence, at least, Mr. Herbert looked fairly angry. As he heard my guardian, his blue eyes flashed so wrathfully that I felt frightened, yet it was in a steady voice that he said:

“You ask where Alexander Grant Johnson went when the scheme in which he had, I confess it, induced me to embark almost all I possessed, failed so lamentably. He went to a place where insult and slander should not, at least, reach him. He had wished to make me rich; to have made me poor was more than he could bear, so he shot himself to the heart, leaving me the bitter sorrow of knowing that he died for my sake. Poor fellow!—poor fellow! That he was imprudent I grant, but I never will hear dishonor coupled with his name, Mr. de Lusignan.”

“Then you had better go out of the world, Mr. Herbert,” was my guardian’s sharp and dry answer.

The looks they exchanged were any thing but

friendly. I felt alarmed at what would come next. I think my guardian must have caught my look, and that its meaning cannot have pleased him, for, turning upon me, he said, very sharply:

“I think, Miss Carr, this is the hour at which Mademoiselle Aubrey requires your presence.”

I made no demur, but rose to go. Mr. Herbert came and took my hand. All he said was, “Good-by;” but I knew his meaning—it was “good-by” forever. My guardian was looking on; there was no lingering over the parting, but, when I reached the threshold of the door, I paused there a while, and gave him a last look. He was, or had been, my friend, and his friendship had cost me very dear; and, now that I had paid the price, I must lose it, and see him no more. I closed the door, and went up to my room with the feeling of a great desolation upon me. Before I had been there five minutes, the drawing-room door opened, and I heard Mr. Herbert’s voice on the stairs talking with Harry, and saying, very kindly, “Good-by, Harry—good-by.”

“Oh! do tay, Georgy!” implored Harry—“do tay!”

“Take him away, Watkins!” said my guardian’s voice. The usual scuffle followed, but Harry was vanquished, and Georgy went away, as all the Georgies do go, hard though the Harries find it. I went to my window, and, standing there, I looked after him through the muslin curtains. I saw him pass under the Gate of Gabrielle, then vanish, without having once turned back. Presently I heard my guardian going out, and I was alone in the house once more. I was my own mistress. I availed myself of my liberty to go out too. I passed through the town and gardens, and came out at the Perspective. It was, as usual, very lonely, though safe, from its proximity to the road and palace. I sat down on a rock, and brooded over this last and unexpected trouble.

I felt thoroughly wretched. It is the gift of youth that its sorrows, like its joys, are to be eternal. In that dark hour I could see no gleam of comfort before me. Every thing was lost, and lost forever. My guardian was displeased with me; mademoiselle had become cold; Elizabeth thought me treacherous. My only tie of kindred was broken, and my future husband had cast me off with cruel upbraidings, which I found it impossible to forgive, and the only one who had been wholly kind and true to me had just bidden me good-by forever. In this hour of desolation, this seemed the keenest of all my griefs.

As I sat thus, feeling both miserable and

lonely, a step through the broom and heather behind me made me turn round. I looked, and saw Clovis. He carried his box of vipers and lizards, and looked the same young savage I had seen in Apremont.

"What, vipers again!" I said, reproachfully; "and the carving, Clovis?"

Clovis shook his head, and said not a word.

"What, vipers again!" I repeated. "Have you forgotten all you were to do for Belle?"

He looked me full in the face.

"Belle is dead," he said.

I was very sad; but, in the midst of my sadness, I felt a pang as I heard this. I did not attempt to comfort the boy. Not a word of consolation could or would rise to my lips. I had felt a while ago that my sun had set; and his sun, too, was hidden in the night. He had returned to his old life, as a matter of course. What use was it to labor or to strive, since Belle was dead? If he had nothing else, let him have liberty. I suppose my face told the lad how I felt, for, without saying a word, he sat down on a rock by me. He stayed there a little while, looking straight before him, with a strange, stolid sorrow on his young face.

"Where are you going?" I asked, when he rose to go.

"To Avon."

"To sell your vipers?"

"Yes; Monsieur Moreau has ordered them."

He walked away without looking at me; merely bidding me a sullen "bonsoir," as he stepped out on the road. "Good-night." The words seemed ominous—the embodiment of my lonely and broken youth. Good-night to art, to friendship, to love, to all that had made life dear.

With a full and heavy heart I, too, rose and left this spot, and walked homeward. Mademoiselle Aubrey and Elizabeth were alighting from the carriage as I reached the house. Elizabeth was as cold as usual, but mademoiselle, looking down in my woe-begone face with sudden kindness, said, in a friendly voice:

"Come to my room, Mignonne."

I followed her up-stairs.

"You have been crying," she said, when the door of her room had closed upon us. "Mignonne, your trouble is hard, I know it is, but yet you will and must survive it, for you have acted wisely."

I did not answer. I did not tell her that to have bidden Mr. Herbert a last adieu was my heaviest trouble just then.

"I, too, have my trouble, Mignonne," she said—"a great trouble, which nearly broke my

heart; and I did not mean to speak of it, but perhaps it will do you good to know that there are sorrows besides your own."

"O mademoiselle, what has happened?" I cried. "It is something new and dreadful, I am sure."

"No," she answered in her firm voice—"it is only the old story." And as I stood and looked at her, she added, with a smile: "I like your eyes, Mignonne, they are so prettily in earnest. Whatever you may say, they tell it faster than your tongue, though that can be nimble enough. Well, Mignonne, my trouble is this: Some time ago there appeared a paragraph in the *Times*, which sent your guardian to London. It said—ah! what a rumor!—that his nephew and my darling was not dead. Can you realize that, Mignonne? I never knew what Mr. de Lusignan had gone away for till he came back, and told me the report and its falsehood—for it was false!—false! To know that it was thought true for a while has been too much for me, Mignonne. I keep thinking that such a thing might have been, and it breaks my heart!—it breaks my heart!—understand that if you can."

It seemed to me that I did. It also seemed to me that a veil was torn asunder, and that through the rent I saw a strange story in the past; but no lightning-flash across the sky was ever more fleeting than that glimpse. It passed, and left me once more in utter darkness, perplexed and at fault. It may be, too, that my own present trouble would not let me dwell upon the past story of Elizabeth just then, and also that I was ill in body as well as in mind. They all noticed my altered looks that evening, and Elizabeth's comments upon them were not kind, I believe—I believe, but am not certain, for my memory is a great blank about that time. I went to bed that night, feeling so ill that I thought I should never rise again. Nor did I the next morning, nor the day that followed, nor for many a day after this. I was ill with a low fever that took me to death's door, and left me there; and so I lingered on, neither crossing the dark threshold, nor coming back to the light of life; till at length youth prevailed, and I was pronounced out of danger. And all that time Elizabeth, tender and devoted, watched by me unwearily. Night and day I found her by my bedside. Her only answer when I pressed her to leave me was:

"I am very well here, Bessie."

"But you will be so tired," I pleaded.

"I do so like it," she replied, mimicking me kindly.

At length, as I said, I was pronounced out of all danger. It was then, but not without a careful preamble, that Elizabeth mentioned James Carr. He had sold out all he possessed, and gone off to Australia with his three little sisters.

"It seems he had not been doing at all well in Yorkshire," added Elizabeth; "and that may have made him irritable, Bessie."

"Poor fellow! God bless him!" was all I could say.

I longed to ask Elizabeth about Mr. Herbert, but did not; and if Eugène Herbert had never existed, had never looked at her beautiful face with adoring eyes, she could not have been more silent than she was. No one mentioned him, no one seemed to miss him. Once hearing in the street the loud bark of a dog, which sounded like that of Neptune, I gave a great start. They all looked at me in surprise. Elizabeth laughed at my having got so nervous, and I do not think that even she guessed what I had been thinking of.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE curtain often drops on the stage of life, and the wearied actors in the drama rest a while before they begin anew. So it was with us; the deepest lull followed that tempest of passion. Late summer ripened into autumn, and autumn yielded to wintry frosts and snows, and still we lived on at the old house in Fontainebleau, none of us, not even Mr. de Lusignan, I believe, knowing why we stayed there. He, to be sure, did not find our solitude irksome, for every now and then he was missing from the breakfast-table, "business" having suddenly taken him off to Paris, or even to London.

"Dear, dear!" Elizabeth would say, mockingly, when mademoiselle quietly gave us this account of Mr. de Lusignan's doings, "what a very busy man the poor gentleman is!"

To which remark mademoiselle never returned any sort of answer. It was lucky that we none of us disliked this quiet and lonely life, in a strange place and a strange country. Elizabeth and I were friends again—not as we had been once, but friends enough to make our companionship pleasant. It had been more than that in the days that were gone by; then I had told her every thought that passed through me; and now she had taught me to keep my own counsel, and I had taken the lesson to heart, and not forgotten it.

I could not. I had lost my lover and my friend, James Carr and Mr. Herbert, but I never

mentioned either to her, often as I thought of them. I wondered how James Carr fared in his new home, and how Mr. Herbert was getting on in his battle with the world; but I had voluntarily given up James, and voluntarily too Mr. Herbert had bid me an adieu which he intended as final; what, then, had my thoughts to do with them?—and would not Elizabeth have scoffed, or, at least, wondered at me, if I had broached the subject? Besides, I could not. I remembered how the jealousy of James seemed to have awakened that of Elizabeth; and during the long winter I speculated, sadly enough, upon the possibility of my having been the cause of that sudden estrangement between her and her lover which neither he nor she had ever explained to me!

All this I kept to myself. Elizabeth did not even know a hope which I then cherished, all the more fondly that it was the only ray of sunshine which pierced the dull cloud of my grief. As I recovered slowly from the fever which had laid me so low, my guardian had spoken of going to Ireland, and taking me with him.

I suppose I had a traditionary sort of mind, a mind much out of fashion in these days, I am told—a mind that looks back to the past, and loves its historical country and unknown kindred. For Ireland, about which I knew little or nothing, attracted me wonderfully. I wanted to look at it, to see what it was like, and so this careless promise of my guardian's became the one thing that I thought of. I had relations in Ireland; I did not know where they were—never mind, I should be sure to find them out, through one of those wonderful chances which play so large a part in the story of the young. I mean that story woven out of their own brains, which steps so gayly before them in the path of life, walking on tiptoe through the thorns and briers, or dancing like a mote in the sunshine.

Now, one bleak morning, late in March, I was following that pleasant vision with more zeal than discretion, when a ruthless hand tore the flimsy cobweb to pieces. We were all taking our breakfast—that is to say, mademoiselle was reading a letter which she had just received; Elizabeth, looking lovely and dreamy, was drinking her coffee; my guardian was breaking the shell of his third egg; and I—having first eaten my buttered toast, and drunk one cup of tea—was going through that series of marvellous coincidences, thanks to which I was recovering a missing aunt and three lost cousins, all good, warm-hearted girls, when Mr. de Lusignan said:

"I hope it will not take you long to pack up, Mignonne?"

"Oh! are we really going?" I cried, with a joyous start.

"You are going, Bessie," he rather dryly answered.

"To Ireland?" I suggested, dubiously.

"I did not utter the word Ireland," he replied, very disagreeably.

Consternation must have been written in my face, but my guardian did not care for such mute language.

"And where are we going?" I asked, faintly.

"To England." He spoke shortly, and rose as he spoke, and walked to the fireplace, and took up a newspaper. I looked at mademoiselle. She answered the look with one of tranquil gravity. She was not taken by surprise, if I was. From her I turned to Elizabeth—she stirred her coffee with her spoon very quietly; but I fancied I saw the rebellious curl of her dainty lip; my hopes rose at once.

"Oh! dear, what a disappointment!" I exclaimed, with sudden petulance.

"What!" said my guardian, looking at me over the edge of his newspaper with genuine surprise.

"I am so disappointed!" I persisted, looking at Elizabeth, who went on stirring her coffee and made no sign, at which my heart fell somewhat. "I did hope to see Ireland," I resumed; "but of course you like going to England best."

Mr. de Lusignan laughed.

"I am not going there at all," he said, curtly. "I am going to Spain."

Elizabeth just raised her head for a moment, and looked straight before her through the window. It seemed to me as if a half sigh of relief passed through her parted lips, but that was all.

"Then you send us to England?" I resumed, in an aggrieved tone, feeling indeed quite ready to cry with vexation and annoyance. "I suppose you like it?" I added, looking reproachfully at mademoiselle.

"I am not going, my dear," she answered, very quietly.

I looked at Elizabeth—she was silent, not merely silent in speech, but silent and impenetrable in aspect as any stone sphinx of the desert. I began to feel rather frightened. Had I done wrong? Had I been naughty, and was I now punished and exiled alone to England? I was not compelled to put the question.

"Mrs. Henry and you are going together," resumed Mr. de Lusignan.

Surely Elizabeth would never tolerate being thus disposed of? I turned to her, for if I was a rebel, she was my chief, without whom I could

not act; but again my appealing eyes met with no response. My captain went on stirring her coffee. Either the cause was lost, or—I clung fondly to that secret hope—the decisive moment for action had not come. So I submitted with a "Very well, I shall pack up," that meant, "I cannot help myself, you know."

I went up to my room and looked about me rather disconsolately. Now that I was not going to Ireland, I clung to this temporary nest with sudden regret. It seemed as if something of myself must remain in the home I was leaving. The window which had let in sky and sunshine to me, these silent walls that had heard and would keep my counsel so faithfully when I was gone, that narrow floor, which was to me as the deck of a ship is to the captain, my little world whereof I was sole and sovereign mistress—all these surely were as a portion of myself, and would leave me the poorer for our parting. But it must be. Our autocrat had spoken, and all I had to do was to pack up at once. Before I began, however, I thought I might as well see what Elizabeth was doing. I went to her room, and found her standing over Watkins, who was methodically shaking out, and then carefully folding up, a beautiful and costly lace shawl. The bed, the chairs, were covered with articles of wearing apparel; and a large trunk, studded with nails, and looking armed *cap-à-pie* for railway encounters, stood wide open on the floor.

That mademoiselle and I should submit to Mr. de Lusignan's will, was a matter of course; but this sudden compliance of his rebellious daughter-in-law's surprised me, and also destroyed all the latent hopes I had placed in her ultimate resistance.

"How do you like it, Elizabeth?" I asked, rather crossly.

"Like what, Bessie?" she composedly replied; "the packing up? Oh! yes, I am so fond of it. Packing up, removing to a new house, and buying and selling, are my delight.—Take care, Watkins. You really must get some silk paper. I told you so at once."

She spoke very shortly, and was so much engrossed by the necessity of silk paper, that she scarcely gave me a look. I left her dispirited and crestfallen.

My store of worldly goods was not superabundant in those days, so my packing up could not take me more than a few hours. I set about it at once, for Mr. de Lusignan's wishes were so many whirlwinds, which swept every one and every thing before them. Since he wanted to go to Spain, he could not hurry us too quickly away from Fon-

tainebleau. And yet this wish of his amazed me much. Was he so sure of Elizabeth now that he thus let her and the boy out of his reach, not even keeping the safeguard of mademoiselle's presence over her? Another question perplexed me when I thought about it. Had Mr. de Lusignan a home in England, that he sent us to it?—and, if he had not, whither could we possibly be going? It had not occurred to me to put these questions at the proper time, and the information which I now got from mademoiselle nearly took my breath away, so great was my surprise. She came to my room to give me that needful knowledge, just as I sat down, rather tired and a little out of breath with my packing.

"Has Mr. de Lusignan told you to whom he sends you, Mignonne?" she asked, sitting down on a little chair by the window.

"Then we are not going to Portland Place?" I said, doubtfully.

"There is no Portland Place now," she answered, with a sigh. "I do not know if Mr. de Lusignan will ever have a home in England, or anywhere, again."

I made no comment, but waited.

"You are going to Miss Russell's," she pursued.

"Surely not to Mr. Herbert's Miss Russell?" I cried, amazed.

"Yes, my dear, to her. Did you not know she was an old friend of Mr. de Lusignan's? She feels dull, I believe, and has asked Mrs. Henry, the child, and you, to go and spend a few weeks with her. She resides for the present in a rather lonely house in —shire. The country around is beautiful, and your stay will not be so long as to allow you to feel very dull, Mignonne."

"My goodness!" I exclaimed, still dismayed, "what takes us to that old Miss Russell's?"

Mademoiselle laughed. "Old Miss Russell is much younger than I am," she said; "old Miss Russell is barely forty."

"Well, but what takes us to her?" I said, piteously. "She does not know us, and how can she care for us?"

"I believe we were all to go; but Mr. de Lusignan has other views for himself, and Miss Russell's invitation is very convenient just now. But he will not leave you long out of his sight, and, as I said before, you will not have time to feel dull. But, though I really think you will find Miss Russell's house a pleasant house in many respects, I wish to utter a few words of warning before we part. It is hard to say so to so young a thing as you are, Mignonne," she added, looking at me very kindly, "but you must be on your guard in

that house. Miss Russell has her peculiarities, and you must be careful—not to humor them, an angel could not do that, but—to avoid making mischief. Forget, Mignonne—forget as much as you can."

"Forget what?" I asked, rather bluntly.

"Every thing that concerns yourself and other people, Mignonne. Let there be no past for the five or six weeks you are to spend there—let it be all present or future, but past never." She spoke so emphatically that I was a little startled.

"Oh! Elizabeth will manage all that," I said, in some alarm. "You know how clever she is; and I—really, mademoiselle, I am quite stupid in those things."

Mademoiselle looked at me and sighed.

"My dear," she said, quietly, "rely on yourself alone in this as in other things. Never put your prudence, any more than your conscience, in the keeping of another. Mrs. Henry is very beautiful, and very amiable; but is she prudent?"

I felt the force of the argument. No, Elizabeth was not prudent—that was true enough. Men and women of strong wills rarely are; but then she was so clever. Besides, though mademoiselle's warning impressed me while it was being uttered, another thought far more engrossing rose to my lips, in words which, however, were not spoken. How was it that Elizabeth, so long and so jealously guarded, was thus suddenly set free? I longed to put the question, but did not know how to frame it; and while I thus hesitated, mademoiselle rose and left me, merely saying:

"We go to-morrow morning, you know."

And we did go. The next morning we bade Fontainebleau adieu. I went early into the forest, to look around me once more. A tempestuous wind was blowing through the leafless trees, and along the shadowless avenues, above which big gray clouds were flying. The green world which I had seen so gay, which had been so full of the song of happy birds, was now both cold and mute. Yet I turned away from it with a sort of sorrow. It seemed as if many a happy day were staying there forever behind me. I had paid those days their full price, true, and bought them rather dear, but what of that? They had been mine, and who knew what the future held in store? But youth has many a secret hope ever whispering in its ear, and where is the use of recording, now that life has told its tale, all that Hope said to me, as we walked back together to the house of the fair Gabrielle?

CHAPTER XXX.

WE parted from Mr. de Lusignan in Paris, where we spent a week, and from mademoiselle in Boulogne. It was to be a brief separation, and yet the tears rose to my eyes as I stood on the deck with my hand in hers; but there was a sort of passion in the way in which Elizabeth kissed her, left her, then came back and kissed her again.

"God bless you, my dear!" said mademoiselle, kindly, but with a quiet smile on her pleasant face. "I shall not waken Harry, since he has chosen to fall asleep at the awkward moment."

She glanced toward the child, who, tired with the journey, had laid his little sallow face on Watkins's shoulder, and was sleeping there.

"Write to me soon," she added, turning toward me.

The bell rang. There was the usual confusion, and mademoiselle left us. I looked after her till I could see her no more, and, when I turned back to Elizabeth, I found her standing by me, with the sea-breeze blowing back her black veil from her face, and a look in her eyes, and a smile on her lips, that filled me with surprise. I touched her arm and said:

"Elizabeth, how glad you look!"

"It's the sea-air," she answered; and indeed her cheeks were as fresh as the brightest roses.

"Yes; but how very glad you do look!" I persisted.

"Then I am glad, I suppose," she answered, so shortly, though not unkindly, that I felt silenced.

Adventure, unless in the awful form of collision, seems to be blotted out of railway-traveling. We escaped that unpleasant variety, and our journey to —shire was both easy and monotonous. We rested for an hour at an hotel in London, and during that hour Elizabeth went out.

"I must get some gloves," she said to me, with unusual communicativeness; but she did not ask me to accompany her. Indeed, her hand was on the door, as she spoke.

Harry was cross and tired, and would have nothing to do with me. I left him to Watkins, and went to the window. It was raining hard, and a gusty wind, which April had borrowed from March, was blowing shrilly among the chimney-tops. London looked very black, grim, and dismal, after the clear skies of France. I turned away with a sigh, and found Watkins and Harry at war. Harry had taken a slip of paper from Elizabeth's "Bradshaw" on the table and

would make what he called "a 'Ock of it." Watkins remonstrated, but Harry carried matters with a high hand, and would have prevailed but for me. I took the paper from him, thrust it into my pocket, and, heedless of his black looks, took up "Bradshaw," for want of better reading.

Elizabeth came in before the hour was out, and threw a pair of gloves on the table.

"They must do for you, Watkins," she said. "They will certainly never do for me. I hate London for that. Shop-people will make you buy—tiresome things!"

"But, Elizabeth, how could you be persuaded into buying these gloves?" I exclaimed, looking at them. "They are twice too large! How could you—"

"Oh! because I am a simpleton," she interrupted, carelessly. "Well, we are going, I suppose. The railway waiting-room is as good as this."

Night was falling when we reached Hanvil Station, a little lonely station as ever was. We were the only passengers who alighted, and thus ascertained at once that our luggage was missing. Only my trunks had escaped the calamity, but both Elizabeth's were gone.

"But the luggage *must* be found," imperiously said Elizabeth, turning on the railway-attendant. "I have not got a thing to wear."

Spite this irresistible argument, the trunks were not found. It was plain, though quite inexplicable, that they had remained behind.

"There never was any thing so vexing," said Mrs. Henry, addressing the world in general. "My child has literally nothing but what is upon him."

The station-master promised to send an inquiring telegram directly, and with that promise we must needs be satisfied. Miss Russell's carriage had been waiting for us all this time; we entered it, and drove away at once.

"How vexatious!" I began, full of condolence for Elizabeth's trouble. "I hope your luggage is not lost."

"I hope not."

"Only, Elizabeth, how can it have gone away? Do you know, I think it must be at the hotel."

"Oh! where is the use of worrying about that?" she interrupted, leaning back in the carriage.—"I believe you have a few things of Harry's in your bag, have you not, Watkins?"

"Yes, ma'am, I have."

"Oh! very well, I can wait."

I felt silenced. Elizabeth shut her eyes in

weary indifference to every thing around her; but the world, under all its aspects, was still a splendid picture-book to me, and I looked out of the carriage-window as eagerly as if the darkness, which was fast coming down, were never to be raised again from the pastoral-looking landscape through which we were driving. At length we reached a square black mass, that lit suddenly as we drew up in front of it; there was a deep baying of dogs, a door flew open, figures moved in the hall, and a low voice said, in tones that were very sweet and clear:

"I am so glad you came to-night! I hope you had not a rough passage."

I could not help starting as I recognized Miss Dunn's unmistakable voice.

"Thank you," carelessly answered Elizabeth, who alighted first, "we got on very well.—Give me Harry, Watkins."

I tried not to be stiff with Miss Dunn when I alighted and confronted her, but cordiality was not in my power. She, however, was sweet as a May morning.

"Miss Russell will be so glad!" she said, with her winning smile, "and she has been so anxious the whole day. She is rather poorly now, asleep on the sofa, and I dare say you will prefer going up to your room before dinner. We do not dine for half an hour yet."

This civil dismissal of Miss Dunn's to our respective bedrooms took place in the hall, but unluckily the polite part of it received the flattest contradiction from a sharp, middle-aged voice, which, issuing from the room on our right—the door had remained ajar—said emphatically:

"We do not dine for another hour, Miss Dunn."

"Oh! not for another hour," remarked Miss Dunn, by no means disconcerted. "How nice! You will have the right time to rest—half an hour is not enough."

I do not know how Elizabeth, who, if she looked very lovely, also looked very stately, would have answered Miss Dunn's commonplaces, if Harry had not wakened, and begun screaming with startling suddenness. We all hurried upstairs. Elizabeth, Watkins, and the culprit, disappeared through one door, while another was opened for me by a neat little maid in a white cap. This good genius soon vanished, to return with hot water; after which I remained alone in a blue-chintz bedroom, with two pale wax-lights burning on the toilet-table, and my trunk standing before me on the floor.

I went to the window. The moon was up, hunting with angry haste black clouds, that fled

in fear before her. The wind helped her on with a hollow blast that passed like a tempest through the trees below. In the garden all was black and white, and every thing had so weird a look that I dropped the blind which I had raised, and went back to my toilet-table. I stood there, looking at my room, and feeling as if I must needs be its first guest, so little token did its blue-chintz bed, chairs, and curtains, and, above all, its irreproachable decorum and exact neatness, give one of a predecessor.

"What a formal old maid Miss Russell must be!" I thought, with secret uneasiness and awe.

An old maid Miss Russell undoubtedly was, but formal her bitterest enemies could not call her. I was dressed and ready when Elizabeth came in for me.

"Oh! you have got the young ladies' room," she said, glancing round her—"blue and girlish. Mine is crimson. Don't look so frightened, Bessie," she added, kindly, "Miss Russell is sure to behave well, since we are in her house."

We went down together; but, spite this encouraging assurance, I kept behind Elizabeth, and, while she entered first, I lingered on the threshold of the drawing-room. What subtle magic is that which paints both so keenly and so charmingly for the eyes of youth? The lines which later grow so faint are very clear; the colors which become so dull are very vivid to these young eyes. As I stood thus behind Elizabeth, I caught a glimpse of a picture which, though brief, was so bright that years have not effaced it. In a yellow-damask arm-chair sat a dark-haired and dark-eyed woman, with her hands folded lightly on her lap, and the light of a blazing wood-fire shining full on her fallow face. Opposite her sat Miss Dunn, pale and colorless, spite that burning glow. Both were silent; neither moved nor looked round at the opening of the door. It was as if they were both under a spell, to sit thus, mute and motionless, on either side of that fiery hearth. At length, and as Elizabeth stepped across the floor, Miss Russell turned toward her, and, without rising, smiled, and stretched out her hand in welcome. "I am glad to see you," she said, in a voice which, though somewhat harsh, was not unkind. "It is very good of you to come to a lonely misanthrope—and of Miss Carr, too," she added, giving me a gracious bend of her dark head. "You are scarcely altered," she resumed, looking hard at Elizabeth; "I suppose I can't say any thing kinder."

"I suppose not," answered Elizabeth, with a careless laugh; and I thus learned—to my great

surprise—that she and Miss Russell were old acquaintances. “And so you have lost your luggage?” continued the lady of the house.

“So tiresome!” murmured Miss Dunn, in ready condolence.

“Yes,” coolly answered Elizabeth. “I shall have to dine in my travelling-dress—very tiresome, as you say, Miss Dunn.”

“But how did it get lost?” resumed Miss Dunn.

“Oh! it is not lost—only astray.”

“My dear Mrs. de Lusignan,” remarked Miss Russell, “I do not wish to be depressing, but every thing that is lost begins by being astray.”

“Well, then, I shall buy new things, and have a change,” answered Elizabeth, with much composure; for if there was a thing she disliked, it was being pitted.

Miss Russell turned to me.

“Did you leave Mr. de Lusignan quite well, Miss Carr?” she inquired—“by-the-way, you excuse me, I hope, for receiving you thus sitting, but you know, of course, that I have no legs.”

My confusion at this unexpected piece of information equalled my surprise; and Miss Russell evidently enjoyed both.

“Dear, dear, and *did* no one tell you?” she exclaimed, in pretended amazement. “Well,” she added, with engaging candor, “I may as well open my closet, and show you the skeleton at once. I have got a murderer in my family. You would feel awkward if you learned it later.—And now, Miss Dunn, I think we’ll have our dinner.”

A servant in black came and wheeled Miss Russell’s chair into the dining-room, where we sat down to a repast which showed that, like my guardian, Miss Russell set her full value on the good things of this world.

“I am a misanthrope,” she said to me, “but I keep a good cook.”

She was more than a misanthrope, as I soon discovered. She was profoundly independent. She was shrewd and clever enough, after a certain fashion, but very ignorant for a woman of her birth and property. Her money had only helped to give her the coolest self-confidence in the way of assertion which I ever met in any one. There was positive intrepidity in some of her statements, and once she had said a thing she stuck to it unflinchingly. Books had taught her nothing, for she never read; and she was so generous, not to say lavish, that even the most disinterested of those who came near her could not help letting her have her way.

“She was so kind, poor thing, and so afflicted,

Besides, it really was no use contradicting her, you know.”

And it really was not. I believe the presence of strangers acted as a stimulant upon her, and drew out her peculiarities, for I was more struck with them on this first evening than during the rest of our stay.

“So you liked Fontainebleau,” she said, turning to me as, dinner being over, we went back to the drawing-room. “Well, I don’t fancy I should like the place. According to Mr. Duke, it is full of rats—and I hate white mice.”

“I never saw any white mice in Fontainebleau,” I replied, feeling rather aggrieved.

“Well, but there are rats in Fontainebleau,” argued Miss Russell, “I know it, and mice are young rats, you know.”

She made this astounding statement in a tone that defied contradiction. I looked at Elizabeth; she was quite grave and unmoved. I looked at Miss Dunn; she gently bowed her pale face over her cup of tea, as if in assent. I was confounded. Were mice, white ones too, only young rats, after all? There were many mysteries in Nature with which my limited knowledge had not made me familiar. Was this one? If so, when and where did mice end, and rats begin?

“It is just like mad dogs!” resumed Miss Russell, following out a concatenation of ideas that wholly escaped me. “Do you believe in mad dogs? I never knew one in all my life. I don’t believe there is any such thing out of the newspapers. All made up. Why should a dog go mad? Just tell me that? I love dogs. I know they bite now and then, but I don’t believe in their insanity—that won’t go down with me. Besides, to lose one’s reason is the badge of the human being.”

And having thus slipped from rats to dogs, from hydrophobia to insanity, and from insanity into the loss of reason, Miss Russell dismissed the matter as settled.

And yet it seemed to me, even then, that this independent and original lady was strangely under the guidance of Miss Dunn, that embodiment of dull commonplace.

“Do you not like this burgundy?” Miss Dunn had said to me at table. “Oh! I beg your pardon, I see it is claret you have.”

“Now what does *he* mean?” had cried Miss Russell, without giving me time to answer; “*he* knows I cannot dine without burgundy on the table!”

And the sinning “*he*” had to produce the missing wine; and, as he did so, gave a scowl to Miss Dunn, who smiled placidly over her glass.

Miss Dunn, I fancied, liked burgundy, and perhaps did not care for claret! And so it was about tea. When Miss Dunn thought it was time for that pleasant beverage, she pitied us for not having had a cup in the railway-carriage as we came along. "So refreshing," said Miss Dunn.

"And why do we not have tea all this time?" asked Miss Russell, in sudden surprise and indignation. "What does *she* mean? *She* knows I like tea early."

Tea came, and *she*, though invisible, got a vicarious scolding, which made me conjecture that Miss Dunn could not be the beloved of the household. Having thus secured her favorite wine, and got her tea at the right time, Miss Dunn now thought that she would like the repose of her bedroom. So, looking at me with the tenderest compassion, she observed, in her sweet tones:

"How pale you look, Miss Carr! I fear the fatigue of this journey has been too much for you."

Miss Russell looked at me; then her eyes sought the large looking-glass opposite her. I could see her scanning her own image there with a sort of uneasiness.

"We all look pale," she said, a little nervously, "and shall be the better for going to bed."

"I think so too," candidly replied Elizabeth, who looked *ennuyée*, and required no pressing to retire.

Though I received no invitation to do so, I unceremoniously followed her to her room. It was very like mine, only crimson—in honor, I suppose, of her being a matron.

"O Elizabeth!" I exclaimed, point-blank, "you actually know Miss Russell!"

"Yes," she negligently answered. "I knew her years ago."

"And I, who thought we were coming to a strange house!" I said, reproachfully.

"It is strange to you, Bessie."

"I should not have felt it so if you had told me that you knew Miss Russell."

"Should you not, really?"

"Why did you not tell me, Elizabeth?"

"I am sure I don't know. Where is the use of telling every thing, Bessie?"

She leaned back in her dark-crimson chair, and clasped her hands above her head, after a fashion which she had when her thoughts were wandering. I stood before her, feeling reproved and chilled. That was her rule. Where is the use of telling every thing? She felt no need to open her heart to human creature. She was

light and frivolous enough in some things; but, after all, she was strong, for she could keep her own counsel, and bear her own burdens. I guessed that she was tired of me, but curiosity, stronger than pride, kept me standing there.

"And what did Miss Russell mean by telling me that she has no legs?" I asked. "I looked at her after dinner, and I really think she has legs."

Elizabeth laughed.

"Of course she has, though they are useless to her, poor thing! She wanted to startle *you*, that is all."

"And has she got a murderer in her family?" I inquired.

"I never heard that before. I suspect it is a new dodge of the old lady's."

"How odd she must be!"

"Is she so odd, Bessie? To me she seems like most ladies of her time of life, very cross with the world!"

"I am sure she has had a story!" I persisted.

"Every one has had a story," answered Elizabeth, a little moodily. "Hers is a common one. She was never pretty, and she was poor, but she could run about nimbly enough in her young days. There was a Mr. Gray, a sort of cousin of hers, whom she would have given her ears to marry, but who married some one else. She went into hysterics on the morning of his wedding, I am told, but danced at a ball in the evening. Some years ago this fortune came in her waters, and she cast her net and fished it up. Lovers came to her then—Mr. Gray, who was a widower, among the rest. She played with them all for some months; then, just as she was going to make up her mind, she was stricken with paralysis."

"And the lovers all fled," I exclaimed, with sympathy.

"Oh, dear, no!" answered Elizabeth, with a short laugh. "There was not one who would not have married her all the same; but she had sense or mistrust enough to send them adrift. She made up for her infirmity by being the most restless creature alive. She is always *en route*; and as to her misanthropy, she is wretched unless she has a houseful of men especially—and she hates men!—around her. We shall have a rare gathering soon."

She spoke languidly and wearily.

"You are tired, Elizabeth," I remarked.

"Yes, rather," she candidly answered. "Good-night." She held out her hand kindly enough; and, thus dismissed, I left her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE loss of her luggage was a greater trouble to Elizabeth than she had chosen to acknowledge. Long before I was dressed the next morning she was gone to the station, and had received the answer to the master's telegram—"Not found." Another telegram was sent, and a similar answer was returned. On the second day Elizabeth lost patience, and sent off Watkins to London to make inquiries. It had suddenly occurred to her that as we left the hotel we had met a large family coming into the hall where our trunks were, and that the luggage might thus have got mixed and changed. I did not know of the girl's departure till she was gone, and knowing how dependent Elizabeth was upon her maid for all that concerned the child, I asked how she meant to manage.

"I must manage," she answered, impatiently.

Watkins was to return the next morning; but she did not. In her stead came a letter, stating that the luggage had gone off to Devonshire, with the people whom we had met at the hotel; that she was waiting for it to be sent back to London, and that as soon as she got it again she would return to Hanvil.

"There never was such a donkey!" cried Elizabeth, in her rage. "What does she mean me to do with Harry all this time? Why did she not come back, and let the luggage be sent after her?"

"Why *did* you send her after the luggage?" was on the tip of my tongue, but the words were not spoken. Elizabeth had her own ways, and did not like them to be censured. Miss Dunn's early attempts in that direction had all been victoriously routed; she had pitied, she had criticised, she had advised—all in vain. Elizabeth had beaten her on the whole line, and, by a few home-thrusts, carried the war into the enemy's own camp in such style that Miss Dunn retreated precipitately, held up a flag of truce, and asked for an armistice. It was sternly granted, but on certain stringent terms, which Elizabeth's beaten foe was careful not to infringe. All this I had seen and noticed, and now changed the topic of our discourse.

"Elizabeth," I asked, "where is the gathering of people you promised me?"

"It is like the Egyptians in the picture of the crossing of the Red Sea," she replied, gravely. "The canvas was a blank, for the sea was open, you know; the Jews were invisible, for they had crossed it; and as to the Egyptians, why, the

painter said they were coming; and so say I—the gathering is coming."

We stood on a low, flagged terrace, at the back of Miss Russell's house—or rather mansion, since it had two staircases, an ugly, square, commonplace brick building; below us spread the flower-garden, and beyond this the grounds; to the left lay the orchard, as white with blossom as if it had just received a fall of snow. I fired at the sight.

"O Elizabeth!" I cried, with sudden ardor, "do come and look at the cherry-trees!"

"Thank you, Bessie; I do not care for cherry-trees before the cherries are on them."

"Well, then, come and look at the house of the Grays—it is such a rare old place!"

"So you have told me; but, again, I do not care about houses when there is no one in them—besides, my head aches."

"You look so well, Elizabeth—do come!"

But the stone flags on which we stood were not more obdurate than Elizabeth. She resisted me then, as, since our arrival, she had resisted all my attempts to make her join me in my voyages of discovery, not even allowing Harry to come with me. "This was just the time for brain-fever," she said, "and one could not be too careful."

"Well, then, let us stay in the garden," I now rejoined.

"I have letters to write," she promptly returned.

The blood rushed up to my face at this rebuff. She laid her hand on my shoulder, and kissed my cheek with a smile.

"Don't be sensitive, my little Bessie," she said very kindly—"it will never do in life."

I knew that well enough; so, without attempting to argue, I left her, and went my way, and, spite her advice, I wondered—a little crossly, I confess it—why Elizabeth was so obstinate in putting me by. I walked through the flower-garden revolving this question, with eyes bent on the earth, when Miss Russell's harsh voice uttered almost in my ear a "good-morning" that made me recoil in sudden alarm. I cannot say that I liked Miss Russell, though I had already discovered that she liked me. I was afraid of her dark eyes and darker eyebrows; she knew it, and the knowledge half vexed, half amused her. She was now sitting in the sun in her yellow-satin chair, with an open parasol in her hand, and looking like a Chinese lady on an old japanned fire-screen which Mrs. Dawson used to have in her front-parlor.

"Good-morning, Miss Russell," I answered,

vainly trying to be free and easy. "I hope you are quite well this morning"—for Miss Russell had breakfasted in her room.

"No, not at all well. But how far away you stand, Miss Carr!—do you keep aloof because I have had a murderer in my family?"

I could not help laughing as I drew near.

"I don't believe in your murderer," I remarked, with sudden audacity.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Not believe in him!—why, there is nothing in the 'Newgate Calendar' half so authentic. Besides, why should I make believe to have a murderer if I had not one?"

"That you know best," I replied, still looking skeptical.

"Well, my dear," she returned, confidentially, "I may as well make a clean breast of it to you. My murderer is a scarecrow, which I hold up and flourish to keep the sparrows away from my cherries." And, considering, I suppose, that my weak brain was not equal to the comprehension of this figure of speech, she proceeded to explain her meaning. "We all have our cherries—even you, though you look such a dear little innocent, have yours—only our cherries vary considerably with our years. Yours and mine, for instance, are not at all alike. Well, my dear Miss Carr, some keep scarecrows, and some do not, to keep off the cherries. Mine—and a good one it is—is that murderer—a real one, please. When I was young, it kept lovers away; and now that I am old, it saves me from unpleasant company. The weak-minded, the timorous, are shy of me—let them—let them!"

Miss Russell spoke this in a tone that was slightly hysterical; for, after all, the old wound was not healed yet—such wounds never do heal thoroughly, but smart in secret, however bravely we may smile in the face of the world.

"Well," she resumed, in an altered tone, "you were going for a walk, Miss Carr—in what direction, may I ask?"

I did not like to utter the name of "Gray," for the owner of Gray's House was no other than her cold lover, so I dubiously replied that I was going to walk in the country.

"Is scenery your hobby?" tartly asked Miss Russell.

"I have no hobby," I answered, rather affronted.

"Don't say so; we all have a hobby," insisted Miss Russell, getting slightly excited by my opposition, "and young ladies dearly like a canter, I can tell you. When I was a young lady," she added, with some bitterness, "it was

not a canter, but a wild gallop, I took; and much good it did me—much good it did me!" cried Miss Russell, with something like passion in her harsh, ringing voice.

Miss Dunn, who now came up to us with a shawl on her arm, and a newspaper in her hand, diverted Miss Russell's melting mood.

"I thought it was too cool for you," said Miss Dunn, sweetly, "and so I brought a shawl as well as the newspaper."

"Well, it is cool," replied Miss Russell, suddenly discovering the fact. "Do you know, Miss Dunn, I think I shall go in. Will you kindly call Brown?"

"I shall wheel you in myself," said Miss Dunn, still sweetly; "your chair gives no trouble."

And, having thus accomplished the object she had in bringing out the shawl, Miss Dunn put her hand to the yellow-satin chair, and wheeled in the lady who would not trust herself to a husband, but who submitted so completely to her yoke.

I crossed the flower-garden, and made my way straight to a high hedge which limited Miss Russell's demesnes toward the south. There was a gap in that hedge, through which I crept, not without some damage to my hair and garments; but to my great delight. With a new tear in my dress, but with a happy sense of independence and liberty, I found myself on the other side, and in the open country.

I crossed a field, I climbed over a stile, then I trod down—may my footsteps have been light!—the young corn in another field, and so reached a hollow lane, which I already dearly liked. A keen breeze swept over the two meadows between which this path crept up; but it felt warm, pleasant, and sheltered, when I was below. Reckless of future aches and pains, I threw myself down on the grassy bank, and half lay, half sat there, feeling that idle happiness, which is one of the temptations wherewith Dame Nature is ever besetting her unwary visitors. When Adam was sent forth to till the earth, and eat bread earned with the sweat of his brow, he must have found it hard to realize the doom that had been laid upon him; for, though cursed through sin, the earth was fair to look upon. The green trees did not speak of winter; the birds sang as if death were not; and the ground teemed with weeds so lovely and so gay that it must have seemed as if man need never toil.

I cannot say that I thought of Adam as I lay in the sun, for Adam is that sort of remote ancestor whom youth rarely remembers; but never had labor seemed to me so useless a thing as it

did then. Work!—why work? The lovely bank before had not labored, and look at it! All the art of man, all the wealth of Cæsus, could not bring forth a thing that should vie with the green wreath on its tawny brow. First, and decidedly foremost, was a tall sloe-tree, a gay prodigal, all white blossoms, and without a leaf as yet to its back. A little bird was perched on one of its brown twigs, and, without seeming to care for me, stood there trimming itself in the sun. At the foot of the sloe-tree, scattered there in an abundance of which my town-life had given me no conception, grew bunches of primroses, beautiful, delicate, and yellow. I had attempted to count them, and had given it up; shells on a sandy sea-shore are not more innumerable; and, far as the eye could reach, they spread on as if the world were all their own. And they were not alone. The celandine was there, starry and golden; and violets, scentless, but very fair to look upon, peeped out from the young grass; and there were patches of daisies, looking for all the world like charity-school girls, in white caps, talking and chatting together; and the bramble trailed its purple leaves amid the tender spring green of all the young growth beneath; and the furze showed here and there a blossom of the purest gold; and, truly, looking at all this beauty, one might say of it that it was good.

It was delightful to lie thus; but motion, too, is pleasant—besides, I had the house of the Grays to look at, and a big white calf, who stood staring down at me from the brink of the opposite meadow, made me feel somewhat uneasy. Was he fastened? And if he was not, suppose he should want to come down to me? Retreat, if not dignified, was prudent; so I rose, and, crossing more cornfields, I entered a sunny road, which had been a dark path once on a time. Trees that had shed their leaves for a century and more, had flung their heavy boughs across it, and given it shade and coolness. But the purse of the Grays had grown light just as their timber became most valuable, and the stately old elms had fallen beneath the axe. And yet the path was lovely still, with here and there a mossy rock, and here and there the gnarled root of an old tree that had defied the woodman's axe, and still wore a wintry cloak of ivy thrown over its old, brown limbs. It ended in two rows of young trees, tall and slender, that swayed to the breeze, and vainly tried to seem stately. The blue sky looked in everywhere through their thin branches, and betrayed them. Beyond them lay the green park, which enclosed the deserted home of the Grays. A road traversed it. This I followed

till I reached a little stone bridge which spanned a shining stream, and here I paused and looked. The little river flowed under an arch of tall trees, and far away to the right I could see the dark wheel of an old water-mill. To the left, at the end of a noble avenue, which the pride of the Grays had not allowed them to touch, rose Gray's house, a stone mansion, standing quiet and stately in its green solitude. It was all shut up, and looked desolate, but neither ruin nor decay had touched, as yet, the abode of the old family. They did not like it. When they came to it their visits were abrupt and unexpected, and when they left their departure resembled a flight. Every one knew why, though they were shy of confessing their true reason. For the last hundred years the Grays had all died there. However they might manage, they seemed unable to avoid that fate. They might live abroad, they might not come for years, they might arrive at night, and depart in the morning, it availed them not—they died nowhere else. Sudden diseases, accidents, fatalities that spared others, were sure to reach them. They knew it—every one knew it—but they did not like it, and so they shunned the place where the destroyer bided his hour so surely.

I stood looking at the quaint old house, so calm and pleasant of aspect in the April sun; and, when, tired of my contemplation, I at length turned away, I took, purposely, a path that led me to another possession of the Grays. They were a peculiar family, and had their own ways about being buried, as well as about dying. It had pleased them, in the days gone by, to eschew church-yards and churches for their dead, and to be laid apart in a place of their own. This was merely a little patch of land, divided by a low hedge from the fields around it. Slabs of stone, some black and sunken, others still white and new, were scattered over it. There was but one tree in it, and that had come there by chance, an old apple-tree, which was not yet in blossom, and coyly spread its green boughs, tipped with rosy buds, to the pleasant spring breezes.

This last resting-place of the Grays was a very tranquil spot. Few people ever came here, and children never crept in through the hedge to gather the daises and primroses that grew amid the graves. It lay alone, surrounded by green fields, that were all yellow with corn in summer; and Death, the husbandman, reaped his harvest here, and laid fresh seed in the dark bosom of the earth, to ripen in a better season, and yield its fruit on the heavenly shores. While I peeped in at the graves over the hedge, a lark sang in the

air above, very sweetly, and very far away; and, as I was young, and did not care in the least for death, all this was beautiful and pleasant. And so time passed, until it occurred to me that I had been out long enough. Spite the tear in my dress, I wished to get back again to Hanvil House through the gap in the hedge. My road homeward thus led me back to the lane I had already been in that morning. This time it was not lonely. Two little boys in gray knickerbockers were drawing a wheelbarrow, in which their elder sister, I suppose, a little girl of eight or nine, sat gravely. She wore a little, rakish straw hat, with blue ribbons, and lolled back in her wheelbarrow with the air of a fashionable woman who takes her drive in the park.

"Don't jolt," she said, as I went by. The two grays, who already looked warm, and were very red in the face—the lane was full of ruts—seemed to feel as if this were too much.

"I'll tell you what, Ellinor," protested the younger one, suddenly standing still—here he unluckily perceived me, as stealthily drawing out a scrap of paper from my pocket, and feeling for a pencil, I was going to put the three, Ellinor and the grays, all down on paper. They stared at me. My opportunity was gone. I walked on, and looked mechanically at the paper which I still held. It was scribbled in a rapid, careless hand, with words and signs which I could not at first decipher. I stood still in some perplexity. At length I read:

"*May Queen*, 3 P. M., Ostende. April 29th, *Hibernia*—Kingstown, May 1st; up-trains, 4, 7, 10." The rest was illegible. Here was a puzzle for me. How had this paper, which I had certainly never written, come into my possession? What had I to do with steamers and railway-trains? All at once the truth came home to me with the suddenness of lightning. This must be the paper which Harry had abstracted from the Bradshaw at the hotel, and which I had taken from him and put into my pocket. It had lain there forgotten, till it now came out to tell me a story which filled me with such sorrow that in the first sharpness of the pang I cried out aloud, "O Elizabeth!" I forgot the children. I sat down on the bank, and wrung my hands in passionate distress; and when I remembered them, and looked round, they were gone. They had crept away through a bush, behind which I heard their voices farther and farther away. I was alone—alone with the sunshine and my desolation.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ELIZABETH meant to leave me. That opportunity for flight and liberty which Mr. de Lusignan had so imprudently given her, she meant to seize. I knew now why her luggage had been lost, why Watkins was gone, why Harry was never confided to me, why his mother never lost sight of him. And I remembered, too, with tardy clear-sightedness, Miss Dunn's looks when Mrs. Henry de Lusignan's missing trunks were mentioned. She had seen through this—of course she had—but then she was afraid of Elizabeth; besides, she did not care, in reality, whether she stayed or went away. But, though partly alienated and estranged, Elizabeth had been the friend of my heart, and a friendship that has been leaves something behind it as penetrating and as sweet as the scent of faded roses. The flower may be withered, we may feel and know that it shall bloom never again, its dead scent is not even that which it had in the days of its loveliness, but the fragrance is still dear.

But I was already learning to endure inevitable things. That inexorable Fate, to which the gods themselves had to submit, must have taught the men and women of old a dreary sort of resignation. What availed revolt, when an iron hand was laid upon the patient's neck? To bear, even more than to act, was surely the great lesson, then.

If Elizabeth was bent upon going, I could not keep her. If she had decreed, with that strong will of hers, that we should never again meet in life, I could not alter her resolve. I had but to submit, then—forget the paper I had read, look on as if I saw nothing, and let her go forever away from me, as, standing upon the shore of a running stream, I might see the boat, with which mine had once sailed, drifting down its current, and make no effort to stop its course.

"I must bear it," I said to myself; and I rose and went home, but not by the gap in the hedge, after all—I was too much sobered for that. I went back by a dull road, which took me straight to the grounds that lay round Hanvil House. I entered the orchard, to stay there a while and think; but scarcely had I pushed open the wicket-gate when I met Miss Dunn, who was coming out.

"Is Mrs. Henry de Lusignan already come back?" she asked, in sweet surprise.

My heart gave a great throb—was she already gone?

"I have been out alone," I answered.

"I am so stupid," said Miss Dunn, opening her blue eyes at herself; "but I really thought you were gone to Hanvil with Mrs. Henry de Lusignan"—she never once missed uttering her name in full—"and the child."

I did not answer. I was wondering whether Elizabeth was going to Ostende on the *May Queen*, or to Kingstown on the *Hibernia*. Belgium was the safer refuge—but then would Mr. de Lusignan ever look for her in Ireland?

"Has she long been gone?" I asked, making an effort to speak.

"Oh, about an hour, I dare say. You know we have some gentlemen to dinner—neighbors of Miss Russell's. Mrs. Henry de Lusignan declared she must either dine in her room or get something to wear; and she has gone to Hanvil for that purpose, I think. She took the carriage, and will not be long away, I dare say."

Gentlemen to dinner; and should I have to encounter them alone, with that secret weighing me down? I pictured all the horrors of such an evening. The delayed dinner, Miss Russell's vexation and ill-temper, Miss Dunn's provoking coolness, and then the gentlemen! With the intuition of despair, I felt that they would all be on my back. Miss Dunn would decline all share of that burden as a matter of course, if it were only to make me wretched. And country gentlemen, I had always heard, were dreadfully heavy and oppressive. They took in so much fresh air, and ate so much solid meat, and drank so much claret, and rode so hard, and prosed so wearily—all classical truths, which I had imbibed with the trusting faith that failed him of Didymus—that they were absolutely intolerable. Of course Miss Russell's back was the one which circumstances had appointed to bear that burden; but Miss Russell professed to hate men, and had evidently relied upon Elizabeth and me to entertain these; and I imagined her quite capable of retiring to her bedroom, and troubling herself no more with her "gentlemen" than if they were mine. I wonder these thoughts came to me, but they did, spite other thoughts that were sad and perplexed enough.

"I am afraid I must leave you," said Miss Dunn, looking at her watch; "it is actually two o'clock! I think we shall have plenty of cherries this year. Miss Russell is so fond of cherries—are you, Miss Carr?"

I replied, despondently, that I was extremely fond of cherries; and I remained alone with the lovely white blossoms, which sun and air and gentle rains and sweet dews were to convert into the fruit that Miss Russell loved. I stayed there

an hour and more; then, feeling too miserable to face Miss Russell, or indeed any one, I went up to my room and remained there till it was time to dress.

I was very miserable, but I did my best to look well. Human nature will have it so. Mary Stuart adorned herself for the scaffold. She was going to die, but I am sure she knew black velvet became what was left of the royal loveliness which had sent the world mad, and has ruled the hearts of men ever since the siren was laid in her grave. For who will venture to say that if this Royal Mary had been shrewish or homely of aspect, the world would have cared so much or so long about her! So I did my best. I was Iphigenia, a victim laid on the sacrificial altar of social duty, but to adorn myself, and make my little person pleasant to look upon, was a part of that duty, a sort of moral law, and I accomplished it to my best and utmost.

My utmost was a gray-silk dress, a tucker of dainty lace, and a scarlet breast-knot. Beyond this my wardrobe would not go, but it was enough. Only *how* was I to go down? Oh! if Elizabeth had only been there! I could have slipped into the drawing-room so nicely behind her! No one would have minded me in her presence. I could have glided into a chair as unnoticed as if I had had the ring on my finger, or on my shoulders the rare mantle, both of which made their owner invisible to common eyes.

Miss Russell dined early, and, what was more, she had already informed me that rigid punctuality was part of her code of morals. I had heard carriage-wheels below—I could not delay any longer. I gave myself a last anxious look, and went down. I listened at the drawing-room door. Miss Russell's harsh voice was talking loud; before she had done, I opened the door as softly as I could. I saw the backs of two gentlemen and a lady, who did not appear to have heard me; and, sitting back in an arm-chair in the full brilliancy of her delicate beauty, Elizabeth, who was fanning herself slowly. I do not know which amazed me most, her unexpected presence, or the dress she wore. It was black as ever, but I recognized it at once. At a look I knew that deep and costly lace garniture, more tasteful even than costly; but where did it come from? Was Elizabeth like the princess in the fairy-tales, whose three dresses—one like the sun, one like the moon, and one like the stars—travelled underground with her wherever she went, and helped her to get back her lost lover's heart? She was fanning herself, as I said; but she was also listening to a gentleman, who turned round

slowly, as Miss Russell said in a sharp tone: "And what do *you* think, Mr. Gray?"

"I beg your pardon, I—I did not hear," answered Mr. Gray.

He spoke in a low, hesitating tone, like one who is not sure that he says the right thing; and he turned toward me as he spoke, the pale, handsome profile of a man of fifty or so; a man essentially elegant, slender, and aristocratic-looking, on whom Nature had set the stamp which she does not always grant to blue blood.

"I was saying," tartly replied Miss Russell, whose dark brows nearly met; but here she saw me, and in a moment I felt drawn to her yellow chair, and was there introduced, without merey, to Mr. Gray—Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gray, and a young gentleman, whose name, I think, was Duke, but I am not sure. I survived the operation, during which a saucy, mocking smile flitted upon the lips of Elizabeth; and, retreating to a chair by a remote table, I there buried myself in a book of sketches; but no one minded me, and I soon looked up.

Mrs. Thomas Gray, a very broad and double-chinned matron, was holding forth emphatically to the young gentleman, of whose appearance I only remember that he had stiff hair, and that he looked weak-minded. Her husband, Mr. Thomas Gray, the country gentleman *par excellence*, was listening to Miss Russell, who talked with great animation and gayety, but whose sallow features seemed to me contracted with care or pain as she watched her early lover's contemplation of Elizabeth.

I do not think Mr. Gray—the owner of Gray's House—made many efforts to entertain or charm my beautiful friend. He looked far too languid to do any thing of the kind; but as there is no fatigue in using one's eyes when the print is large and fair, so he sat and gazed at Elizabeth's beauty with the *dilettante*, critical sort of look with which, when he travelled, he may have sat and gazed at a Raphael, or Giorgione.

I was watching him with involuntary interest, when Miss Dunn, who had not been in the room all this time, now entered it noiselessly, and came and sat by me.

"How very lovely Mrs. Henry de Lusignan looks this evening!" she said, softly.

"Oh! very," I replied; "there is something so brilliant and delicate about her beauty."

But my speech fell unheeded on Miss Dunn's ear. She had started, and seemed to be listening.

"I thought the other guest was coming," she remarked, slowly; then, with a vivacity and

eagerness very rare in her, she turned upon me. "Who is it? *You* know, of course."

"Oh! dear, no," I answered, rather disturbed; "is there another?" For I thought the gathering before me sufficiently formidable, without any addition to it.

"Yes; and dinner has been put an hour later for that guest. Come, confess you know who it is, Miss Carr."

Her sleepy blue eyes had suddenly grown as sharp and keen as needles; but ignorance must have been very legibly expressed in mine, for blank disappointment followed this inquiring look. Miss Dunn, being thoroughly convinced of my ignorance, became as suddenly dull as she had become lively, and made no other effort to entertain me, but sat there by me without saying a word, only every now and then darting furtive looks toward the door. I confess I took very little interest in this new-comer—why should I?—what were Miss Russell's guests to me? My mind was in a whirl with Elizabeth, who looked so cold and handsome, and who was plotting flight all the time. What should I do when she was gone, and I remained alone in this strange house? And then, when would she go?—very soon, I felt sure. Here the sound of the opening door, the voice of the servant uttering a name, and a low, startled "Ah!" from the chair next me, all blended together. I turned round hastily, and saw Miss Dunn staring, with open mouth and eyes, at Eugène Herbert, who stood at the door with the full light of the chandelier falling on his handsome face.

He came in as easy and unembarrassed as ever, went up to Miss Russell, who received him graciously, and seemed at home with every one present. I was amazed and rather bewildered to meet him thus in the house of his enemy. I noticed a change—a very slight, transient change—passing across the lovely face of Elizabeth; also I saw that Miss Dunn's lips tightened, and that her cheeks grew slightly flushed, but every one else seemed unconcerned, and that was all, till Mr. Herbert saw me and bowed courteously.

Dinner was ready; Miss Russell was wheeled in, and my happy stars confided me to the care of the young gentleman who looked weak-minded. [I have always felt convinced that he thought me weak-minded, but never mind.] He was very good-natured, and did his best to enlighten and entertain me all dinner-time. I was so full of other thoughts that, I am ashamed to say it, only a few traits of his remarkable and powerful conversation have survived the wear and tear to which memory is subject on her road from youth

to middle age. Besides, my neighbor was a perfect Tacitus in his way; brevity of style was his idol. He cultivated it especially through the means of ellipsis; and, with the caprice and fancy of genius, he sometimes omitted one part of speech, sometimes another. He did not utter one word till he had taken his soup, after which he graciously turned to me, and said:

"Been Fontainebleau, am told."

I answered that I had spent some months there.

"Liked it?" he suggested.

Was this a statement, or a question? I fancied that it was a question, and replied that I liked Fontainebleau very much.

"Nice place. Know Joseph?"

I was going to ask who was Joseph, but forbore, seeing that my companion was in the agonies of swallowing a fish-bone. This took some time, during which I kindly looked another way. When the operation was over, he resumed:

"Famous dog Joseph had."

"Had he?" was all I could find to say. If I had been older, and more conventional, I should probably have remarked, "How very interesting!" or at least have uttered a girlish "Dear me!"

"Loads of rats Fontainebleau, you know," pursued my informant.

I became lively and attentive. I now saw from whom Miss Russell had received her impression that Fontainebleau was infested with rats. Had she also got from my neighbor the mysterious fact that mice are young rats? I looked at his smooth face and stiff hair, and on reflection did not think he had any thing to do with that fancy. He was, as he would have said himself, "in another line."

"Shambles full," he continued—"rare fun Joseph's dog. Ever saw any thing the kind?"

I replied that I had not; upon which he became suddenly lively, and, carried away by narrative style, he forgot himself so far as to use a few prepositions.

"Well, you see, the shambles are full of rats, and the rats have a cap'n, and the cap'n drills them, as it were, and the rats will fight it out. A great deal of pluck rats have; some would worry Joseph's dog, and fly at his throat. He used to shake 'em off so;" he shook himself with great gusto; "but he kept it in mind, and when he had done with the quiet ones, those that only ran in corners, and didn't fly at him, he teased the others before he killed 'em, to punish 'em, you see. Never punished the quiet ones, only killed 'em. A deal of sense Joseph's dog had."

This interesting and edifying conversation

had not flowed on smoothly. It had undergone all the usual dinner interruptions, and had carried us to the middle of the meal. My companion was too generous and too zealous to give me up when that theme was over; but unluckily my treacherous memory has preserved only a few fragments of the discourse with which he charmed my ear. When I try to remember what it was about, I only get back such words as "Jumping Ben, we used to call him," and "was dreadfully knocked to pieces, you know"—fragments so suggestive and tantalizing to me that I can only compare myself to the *savant* who unfolds the scorched remains of a Pompeian gentleman's library, and deciphering such words as "Rome, Annibal, the dying hero," and the like (in Latin, of course), asks himself in despair whether the lost books of some Roman historian lie there mutilated and useless before him. But I must be candid; I was young and heedless then, and knew as much of the treasures I was casting away as Newton's little dog Diamond knew the value of the manuscripts he so wantonly destroyed. Besides—why deny it?—Elizabeth sat opposite me, between Mr. Gray and Mr. Herbert. Mr. Gray was very handsome, languid, and quiet; I did not mind him, but I thought a good deal of the other two. They were very pleasant and very smiling—as pleasant as if they had never met before. There was not a cold look in her eyes—not a reproachful frown on his broad, clear forehead. As for passion, as for jealousy, as for love, it was as if these ghosts of the past were laid forever at rest, and could never haunt these two again. I saw their faces sometimes of one side, sometimes of the other, of the flowers and ferns of the *épergne*. I do not think they saw me.

Once or twice I heard the speech that passed between them. It was then, I dare say, that my neighbor talked of "Jumping Ben." It was very insignificant, and I vainly tortured my brains to give it a meaning.

"How did you like it?" she asked.

"Not much," he answered. "I preferred—"

Here "Jumping Ben" again came in, and I neither knew what Mr. Herbert did not like much, nor what he preferred.

"Do you like change?" resumed Elizabeth.

"Not for its own sake, but I like it when it has a pleasant face."

Here Elizabeth caught my eye, and nodded to me a little mockingly. Mr. Herbert saw it, and gave her a peculiar look, attentive and shrewd—such a look as one saw rarely with him, but which let in a light both sudden and unex-

pected upon his real nature, and changed one's impressions of it as completely as the cloud changes the aspect of the sunny landscape. I strained my ears and my eyes to hear and see more than this, but, thanks to my intellectual neighbor, it was impossible. All I saw was that, if Mr. Gray was silent, and left Elizabeth pretty much to her neighbor, he was as attentive as ever in his contemplation of her beauty.

Miss Russell, who had been very lively all dinner-time, made up for her vivacity by a nap when we were in the drawing-room. She took her ease, like the man in his own inn, without scruple. Miss Dunn entertained us after her fashion of fluent commonplace, flowing on as imperturbably and as sluggishly as the waters of a canal. Elizabeth sat and looked, as she felt, perfectly indifferent, and Mrs. Thomas Gray, leaning back in her chair, took possession, to my alarm, of my luckless individual.

Mrs. Thomas Gray's voice was naturally deep and sonorous; this had suggested to her perhaps the propriety of a solemn, not to say pompous style of conversation—just as fair women like blue, and brunettes have a weakness for bright colors. At the same time, Mrs. Thomas Gray kindly tempered this rather oppressive tone by a grave jocosity, which was probably meant to place her hearer at his or her ease. I say her hearer, because she made it a point never to address more than one person at a time. I was now thus favored.

"You have been in Switzerland, Miss—"

Here she paused.

"Carr," I suggested.

"Then do tell me you did not like it," she explored, in a tone of solemn joking; "I entreat you to tell me that you did not. I think Switzerland the greatest imposition next to Italy. That, however, beats every thing hollow. Switzerland is literally a land of Goshen, Miss Carr, a land of honey and milk, for you can get nothing else to feed upon. I fasted like any Catholic, Miss Carr, while I was in the mountains of that blessed country, and I was in a state of perfect exhaustion when we came down to the valleys again. Mr. Gray's first thought was of course to get some meat for me, and when I actually saw a beefsteak on the table, I nearly shed tears of emotion."

Here, to my great relief, Miss Russell woke up with a short and rather snappish "So they are still in there, are they?" which alluded, no doubt, to the gentlemen over their wine, and suggested the propriety of a solemn chuckle to Mrs. Thomas Gray, and also that she should devote

herself to her hostess. I at once escaped to my remote table, and had scarcely reached it when the gentlemen came in. Miss Dunn immediately came and sat by me.

"How altered Mr. Herbert is!" she said, in her sweet voice.

I raised my eyes to his handsome face—he was already by Elizabeth. I saw few tokens of change there, and I said so.

"Mr. Herbert looks very well," I added.

"Oh! I did not speak of his looks," and she laughed softly; "they are always right, with his classical face. Does it not strike you, Miss Carr, who are an artist, that there is a kind of face one could draw without seeing it almost. So much for the forehead, so much for the nose—a straight one, of course—so much for the upper lip, and so much for the chin."

This was very ill-natured, but, blind as a beetle, I fell into the trap, and, reddening up as I spoke, I answered rather hastily:

"Mr. Herbert's nose is not straight; it is slightly curved."

"Is it?" replied Miss Dunn, raising her pale eyebrows as if she knew nothing about it; "but I assure you, Miss Carr, I meant no allusion to Mr. Herbert's face, or rather nose; indeed, I beg your pardon for having introduced his name. I ought to have remembered what a dear friend of yours he used to be, only I am sure you are too good-natured not to excuse me."

I replied, "Oh! don't mention it," and felt ready to cry with rage.

This was Miss Dunn's revenge for the trick Miss Russell had played upon her in bringing Mr. Herbert to Hanvil House without her knowledge. Satisfied with having exasperated me, she soon found a motive for leaving me to my own thoughts. I was sadly vexed with myself, with every thing, and with every one about me. I took up a book of sketches from the table and looked at, but did not see the Bay of Naples and the Island of Capri. Why had I been so foolish? Should I *never* know better? Why especially was I in this house to be victimized by Miss Dunn? I had not wanted to meet Mr. Herbert again. He had cost me very dear, he had given me up, and he cared so little about me that he did not use me with common civility! Besides—

Here, as if to answer this fault-finding monologue, Mr. Herbert suddenly came to me, and looking at me with quiet friendliness, as if we parted yesterday, sat down, uninvited by any thing in my looks and manner, in the chair which Miss Dunn had vacated.

"I am told that you have not been well since we last met, Miss Carr," he remarked, but his tone was rather that of polite regret than the tone of old affection.

"I have been ill, but that is long ago; I am well again now, thank you."

"You look remarkably well."

I did not answer.

"I little thought I should see you this evening," he resumed, "but I believe Miss Russell likes to take her friends by surprise. She used me as a sort of Medusa's head for one person here."

"Did you not know whom you were going to see?"

"Ladies, I was told."

Another pause.

"How is Neptune?" I asked.

"Neptune is dead," answered Mr. Herbert.

"Oh! I am so sorry!" I said, quickly.

"What a trouble it must have been to you, Mr. Herbert!"

"He was only a dog, Miss Carr. He would have given his dog's life over and over again before living creature should have harmed me. What of that? His very fidelity proved that he was a brute. Must I not prove my superiority over him by a calm, grand sort of ingratitude? The attribute of the human being, you know!"

I looked at him in a sort of perplexity. Mr. Herbert used not to speak so formerly. I was at a loss what to say next; so, after a while, I came out with—

"How do you like this part of the country?"

He seemed surprised at the question, but answered rapidly:

"Very much. It is both pastoral and wild."

"Have you seen Gray's House?" I continued.

"I believe Mr. Gray is not in it yet, for it was shut up to-day, and I know he objects to it. Try to see it while it is shut up. It would make a subject for a picture for you, Mr. Herbert. It is so beautiful and lonely."

Mr. Herbert laughed.

"I am afraid I am never likely to see Gray's House in that enviable state," he replied.

"But it would be so easy," I persisted.

"Even if he goes to it to-morrow, he is sure not to stay long, and if you come while he is away you will see Gray's House in all its beauty."

Mr. Herbert looked at me.

"I see you do not know," he said, after a pause. "Gray's House is mine."

I thought I was dreaming. Mr. Herbert saw

my amazement, and the shrewd look came to his eyes.

"What!" he said, quietly, "do you see no difference in me, Miss Carr? Is the purchaser of Gray's House the same man who painted unsalable pictures in Fontainebleau? Impossible! Your penetration deceives you. There must be a difference in me. I assure you I feel a great one. I have acquired a hundred faculties that I wanted when you knew me first. I have read Molière since we parted, and I have learned from him that the rich man is like his marquis, 'Qui sait tout sans avoir rien appris!'"

"Then you are rich?" I exclaimed, with most uncivilized amazement.

"After a fashion, I am, since I have been able to purchase a house and estate, on which I mean to reside, and that is why I cannot hope to see Gray's House in all its beauty."

I do not know what prompted my next question. "Have you got other houses and estates?" I asked, very seriously.

"No; I am not like the master of Puss in Boots. My landed property is not unlimited. But I have three per cents. Do you know what three per cents. are, Miss Carr?"

I confessed my ignorance.

"Well, I have some of them, and shares—"

"I know all about shares," I interrupted.

"Do you? Well, I have loads of shares in all sorts of things—railways, mines, companies, etc."

"How fortunate you have been!" I remarked, not knowing what to say.

"No, no, not fortunate," he corrected.

"Clever, Miss Carr—shrewd, far-seeing, long-headed. For, to tell you the truth, this money of mine all comes from one source, the much-abused Spanish Galiot Company."

"But I thought it was such a dreadful—" Here I hesitated.

"Swindle!" he suggested. "Yes, the world said so; but the world did what the monument in the city—as Pope says—does daily. And now," he added, very sadly, "now that the poor fellow who gave me this fortune is in his grave, the world does not so much praise him as it admires me for my clear-sightedness."

"But you were clear-sighted," I argued.

"Not I. I liked him, and I had faith in him; but I beg your pardon. Your remark about Gray's House has made me say all this. Do you draw still?"

I shook my head and sighed. He did not understand that with him all my taste for drawing had passed away.

"Of course you paint?" I said.

A sudden cloud came over his face.

"Oh! no," he answered, rather coldly. "As a poor man, I could have fought my way up, though I began so late. As a man of some property, I should ever be an amateur, and not a soul would care for my pictures. When I was a painter, the world would not grant me common sense; now that I am well off, the world will not grant me any gift save that of making more money. Eugène Herbert on the list of directors to a new company would be the very thing, Miss Carr; but Eugène Herbert with an A. R. or an R. A. to it in a catalogue would never do."

This, then, was the thorn of his new lot, since every son of Adam must needs pay the cost of good-fortune.

What more he might have said on this matter, if he would really have said more, was put an end to by Miss Russell. She could never bear to be long out of any discourse, and she now claimed Mr. Herbert's attention, after her imperious fashion; and, not unwillingly, it seemed to me, he turned round from me and my questions to her. He was altered, after all—I felt it, I saw it, during the whole of that evening; for after this he dropped me as completely as if we had been total strangers. Oh! what a dull, wearisome evening it was; and how tired and heart-sick I felt when it was over, and the guests were gone! Miss Russell looked gaunt and more than usually yellow with fatigue—she had talked incessantly; Miss Dunn yawned and shut her sleepy eyes; and, though the roses on the cheeks of Elizabeth were as brilliant as ever, she said she was tired to death. We went up together; at the door of my room Elizabeth wanted to leave me, but I followed her into hers.

"O Elizabeth," I exclaimed, as I closed the door, "were you not amazed to see Mr. Herbert?"

"Ye-es," replied Elizabeth, yawning; and she sank down on a chair with a look of fatigue.

But I would not be deterred, and, standing before her, I pursued:

"It seems he is quite rich now."

Elizabeth did not answer.

"Don't you find him altered?" I asked.

"How so?"

"I can scarcely say; but there is a great change in him—he seems so much older and—harder!"

I could not help sighing as I said this; but Elizabeth smiled and replied, "So much the better for him, Bessie." And I could read in her look and smile that Mr. Herbert had rather gained

than lost in her good opinion. My heart leaped with a secret hope.

"O Elizabeth," I exclaimed, eagerly—then paused.

"O Bessie, good-night," she said, gayly. "I am so tired—I think I shall sleep well."

I do not know how Elizabeth slept. It was late when I fell asleep, and late when I woke. The sun was shining in my room, and a slip of paper lay on my pillow.

"God bless you!" Elizabeth had written upon it. She was gone, after all. I had feared that she would go, but it was none the less hard—she was gone, and I cried bitterly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISS DUNN alone presided at the breakfast-table when I went down.

"Poor dear Miss Russell is so poorly!" she said, plaintively.

I expressed my regret, and looked furtively at Elizabeth's vacant chair. Did not Miss Dunn know that she was gone? Miss Dunn caught my look, and answered it.

"Poor dear Mrs. Henry de Lusignan!" she remarked, helping me to a cup of tea—"so provoking! But servants *are* so tiresome. I told her so when the telegram came. They do it on purpose, to fall ill at the wrong time. So tiresome to take a journey with a child, and all because Watson or Watkins chooses to be dangerously ill."

I heard Miss Dunn in silence. It was some comfort that I had to receive, not to give, or at least abet, a false explanation of Elizabeth's flight. Miss Dunn did not seem to have the least suspicion that it was a flight, but speculated, with every appearance of simple faith, on the day of Elizabeth's return. Did I not think that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan would return on Monday? No. Then I thought she would come back on Tuesday next. Why so? She, Miss Dunn, thought that Monday would be the day; only she should like to know why I fancied it would be Tuesday? I protested, in some despair, that I had no preference for Tuesday; upon which Miss Dunn immediately discovered that I had fixed upon Wednesday. And so she worried me till breakfast was nearly over, when all at once, and I scarcely knew how, Mr. Herbert's name came in.

"It was such a delightful surprise to me!" remarked Miss Dunn; "especially to find him so

well off. I dare say you know, Miss Carr, that I was very intimate with Mr. Herbert and his mother formerly. It was quite a blow to me when dear Miss Russell got Hanvil. I always tell her so. I was, naturally, for my friends the Herberts at that time; but dear Eugène is so clever! he soon got another fortune; and when dear Miss Russell, who is the most generous creature alive, learned that he had bought Gray's House, she hastened to extend the hand of reconciliation. It would have been so awkward to have been enemies and neighbors!"

"How would Miss Russell have managed if Mr. Herbert had come to Gray's House and yet been a poor man?" I asked.

"Ah! but that would have been so very different a sort of thing!" candidly replied Miss Dunn.

She left me to return to Miss Russell. I remained alone, wondering what I should do with myself in that strange house. It seemed preternaturally silent and lonely. The servants were quiet below, for Miss Russell was sleeping. A gloomy gray sky hung low over the garden, and heavy clouds, laden with rain, moved slowly along, followed by others as heavy, as gray, and as monotonous. Miss Dunn had the paper; Miss Russell never read, and had no books—besides, what could books have done for me in my present mood, when it was Elizabeth, and all Elizabeth, and a sorrow that could not be spoken, and for which none could offer me comfort. I went up to my room, and, as I passed by the door of that faithless friend, I could not resist the impulse which made me open it and look in. Every token of her presence had already vanished; no stray book, or handkerchief, or glove, was left to tell me of Elizabeth. She had been there a few days, and she was gone forever, and the room was ready for another guest. Its blank aspect so plainly told me "Forget her," that I shut the door again without attempting to cross the threshold. "Forget me!"—hard lesson, yet one which it seemed I must learn.

I dreaded Miss Russell and her shrewd black eyes; it was, therefore, some comfort, on the theory that it is an ill wind which blows nobody good, to learn that she had a desperately bad headache, which would confine her to her room the whole day. Miss Dunn, who gave me this information at luncheon, was also kind enough to abstain from once mentioning the name of Elizabeth. Indeed, she seemed bent—very kindly, no doubt—on seeking for other themes, and while sipping her burgundy with an absent air, she remarked across the table to me:

"Were you not struck with Mr. Gray—so handsome, so elegant, so very—you know? I am afraid I do not express myself very well."

I replied wearily that I understood her meaning quite well, and that Mr. Gray was all she said. Thus encouraged, Miss Dunn continued:

"He is at Hanvil, you know. He really would not trust himself to Gray's House. I believe it is the token of all superior minds to have such weaknesses. I trust," added Miss Dunn, looking pensively at her wine, "that the fate of the Grays will not extend to the Herberts."

I trusted that it would not, rather dryly.

"Do you not think it a pity Mr. Gray should have parted with Gray's House? It seems it was Mr. Thomas Gray who, by proposing to cut off the entail, brought it all about."

I made an effort to say "Indeed."

"Yes, *you* understand entail, of course. Miss Carr, I have noticed how very clever at all business matters you are. Entail is very mysterious to me, and I wish you would explain—"

"Oh! dear no," I interrupted, much alarmed. "I assure you I know nothing at all of entail; pray don't think I do."

"Now that is cruel!" said Miss Dunn, opening her innocent blue eyes; "because I know nothing of entail, and I should have been so glad if you could have explained how Mr. Gray and Mr. Thomas Gray got rid of theirs. I always thought an entail was a dreadful sort of appendage; but they have cut theirs off as easily as if—oh! how clever, Miss Carr! I should never have found *that* out. I shall certainly tell Mr. Gray how cleverly you settled the question. Of course, cutting off the entail is just like cutting off the tail! I shall certainly tell Mr. Gray."

"But I never said any thing of the kind," I cried, roused out of my apathy by this astounding remark, and especially by the threat of telling Mr. Gray: "I never said that entail and tail had the least analogy."

My vehement denial filled Miss Dunn with virtuous amazement. She began by declaring that she could not have imagined any thing of the kind, she was far too stupid; then she assured me that if I would think well over it, I should find that I must have uttered that original and striking remark, etc.; and having worried me nearly to tears, which, in my present mood, was no hard task, having also finished her wine, she apologized for leaving me, and went back to Miss Russell's room.

Again I was alone with the weary day before me. The clouds had melted into a settled gray

I convinced myself that it would not rain, and went out. The garden did not attract me; still less did I care for a little, formal, Chinese-looking pavilion, where Miss Russell often went and sat in the morning, while Miss Dunn read the paper to her. Nothing in Miss Russell's grounds attracted me; but neither did I care to go near Gray's House. Its owner might not be in it, yet with that dwelling I had nothing to do. Mr. Herbert was cold, and hard, and estranged, and cared no more about me; so I went out into the silence and liberty of the open country, and took the direction which was exactly opposite to Gray's House. The quiet fields did me good; I met some children straggling along and plucking flowers, then I met no one, and went on alone till I reached a little brook. A few trees, still bare of leaves, rose straight, cold, and thin on either side of the water; the chill, gray sky looked back at me from the quiet surface of the little stream that flowed straight on between its two banks, of a cool, rank green. This little river made its way among the tall reeds and rushes, as majestic as a flood passing through mighty forest-trees. I followed it curiously, but there was not much variety in its aspect. It went on quietly, telling me the same story of calm content, till it brought me, by a sudden turning, to the other side of the water-mill, which I had seen when I went to look at Gray's House.

It was an old mill, and evidently long disused, but so pretty and so picturesque that one could not wonder at its having been left standing there. As I now looked at it, wondering whether I should go on or turn back, heavy drops of rain began to fall, and I found that my friend the brook had led me into trouble. Some tall thickets close by made a sort of green niche, into which I crept; and there I stood and waited, trying to believe it was only a shower that was falling. As I stood thus, making a virtue of necessity, but feeling very wet and uncomfortable, a window of the mill, which till then had given no token of life, opened, a childish head peeped out, and darted back on seeing me, like a mouse into its hole; then darted out again, and watched me in my niche. I recognized the Ellinor of the wheel-barrow.

"Will you come in?" she asked, after a while.

It was raining hard, yet I hesitated.

"I am all alone," she resumed, encouragingly.

The rain dripping upon me was reducing me fast to the condition of a water-nymph. I could not resist any longer—I nodded; Ellinor vanished, and soon appeared on the threshold of the door. I darted across, and was in.

"The best parlor is locked, but I can get the key," said Ellinor, eagerly.

"Oh! please if you have a fire in the kitchen let me go to it," I entreated.

Ellinor looked surprised, not to say disenchanted at the lowliness of my tastes; but, seeing how wet I was, she yielded.

I have always thought a kitchen one of the prettiest rooms in a house; I confess that I like brass candlesticks on a chimney, and blue plates on a dresser, as well as clocks of gilt bronze, and Indian china. The miller's kitchen was a delightful place, and the bright fire on the hearth made it more attractive still. I spied out a low chair, took it to the fire and sat there drying my wet feet.

The stormy wind blew gustily through the green creepers outside the window. The rain fell white and heavy with a rushing sound; the world without looked very wild, and all the pleasanter looked the little homely world within. The room was low, large, and gloomy; but the pale ray of light that stole in through the window, touched on its way the plates on the dresser, a shining brass kettle, a sleepy tabby cat dozing on a chair, and little Ellinor's plump white shoulder and golden head, as she stood leaning against the brown old chimney, and looking at me with grave, childish eyes, and the whole made a charming picture.

"Are you often alone, Ellinor?" I asked, thinking how solitary a place this was for so young a child.

"Well, no, not often—considering," answered Ellinor, dubitatively; "but I don't mind; boys are *such* a nuisance!"

"Have you no mother?"

"Oh! dear no," said Ellinor, as if surprised at the suggestion.

"But you have your father?"

"Oh! dear, yes," replied Ellinor, again surprised.

"And is he often out?"

"Always—in the gardens, you know."

I did not feel a right to put further questions. Time to do so failed me, as well as the inclination.

"Ellinor, Ellinor!" called a man's voice at the door, "will you let me into your kitchen? Mind you, I am dripping."

I looked round rather startled. Mr. Herbert did not see me yet, but I saw and knew him as he pushed open the door and stood for a moment on the threshold. Ellinor's offers of hospitality were not profuse.

"You may come in," she said, coolly.

"Thank you, my dear."

He entered, and shook himself on the floor as he spoke. The spray from his wet garments reached me, and at the same moment he became aware of my presence. He colored with a suddenness that showed his surprise.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

I bowed my head, then looked at the fire again. I felt that he would not have come in if he had known I was there. A profound silence followed. Ellinor took the cat, and, nursing it, walked up and down the kitchen. The fire blazed, the wind blew above the chimney, the rain dashed furiously against the window-panes, and I wished myself far away.

How, why was it that Mr. Herbert and I were so much estranged? We had been good friends once, and though that friendship had cost me a life-long affection, I had not held him responsible for the evil he had unconsciously done me. But Mr. Herbert had never told me the reason for which Elizabeth and he had parted. Was it her doing or his? And had I unconsciously helped to separate them? I remembered her cold and alienated looks, and my heart sunk. Had he bought his old liking for me at the cost of his man's love?—and now that we met again did he feel involuntary resentment against me? Oh! if it were so, his was a hard case indeed. But then was it so certain that the evil I had done was irreparable? Elizabeth's flight would give her liberty; and might not also this sudden breaking of her bondage restore her to the truest of lovers? Besides, would Mr. de Lusignan—

Here the cat uttered a pitiful mew—a protest against Ellinor's nursing—which brought my day-dream to an abrupt close. I looked up with an involuntary start, and saw Mr. Herbert standing almost in the place which Ellinor had left, and thence looking down at me with a grave, attentive air.

"I am afraid you are very wet," he said, quietly.

"Yes, rather so," I answered, a little troubled at having to speak.

"Ellinor," said he, turning to the child, "please to put the kettle on."

I guessed the kettle was for me, but could not protest.

"Which will you have, grog or tea?" asked Ellinor, readily.

"Tea to-day, my dear.—You see, Miss Carr," he added, turning to me, "I cannot hide my misdeeds from you. Ellinor has let it out—I do come here and have grog sometimes."

His voice was so like the voice of old times

that I could not help looking at him rather earnestly. His smiling face was the smiling face I knew so well. It was as if a mist had melted away from before me, and I saw things as they were, and not as I had fancied them. I got back my tongue at once.

"Then you often come here to see Ellinor?" I remarked.

"Oh, yes. Ellinor and I are old friends—are we not, Ellinor?" Ellinor nodded.

"Perhaps you are not aware, Miss Carr, that our acquaintance ripened during a week's visit which I paid to Gray's House some time back."

"Have you brought Polly?" here asked Ellinor, putting the kettle on the fire.

"No, Polly has remained behind."

"And pray who is Polly?" I asked, with sudden curiosity.

Mr. Herbert looked slightly embarrassed.

"A young friend of Ellinor's," he replied, shunning my look.

"Then why did you not bring her?" asked Ellinor, in an aggrieved tone.

"I hope you can let us have some eggs and ham?" hastily remarked Mr. Herbert.

"But if the hen *won't* lay!" replied Ellinor, crossly.

"What, no eggs, Ellinor?"

"No—not one."

"O Ellinor, Ellinor, what will Miss Carr think of you?"

Miss Carr thought, but did not say so, that Mr. Herbert wished her to know nothing about Polly, and of course this mysterious Polly was the very thing she longed to know something of; but without giving me time to speculate on that subject, he remarked in a gay tone, that reminded me of the days long ago:

"I never saw you sitting by a kitchen-fire before, Miss Carr, and as I look down at you now I cannot help thinking of little Cinderella. She was a great friend of mine when I was a boy."

"But I am not at all like Cinderella," I cried, rather affronted. "I do not dance with glass slippers on my feet, to begin with; and then I have more than two hundred a year of my own. Now Cinderella had not a farthing, according to the fairy-tales."

"True. Still you remind me of her, spite the two hundred a year. Do not give me that alarmed look, Miss Carr—I have got no sketch-book."

I looked up at him wistfully.

"Then you have really given up painting?" I said, in a tone of regret.

"What if I have?" he answered, with a smile. "What we do is not much, after all. What we are is the thing."

He spokelike one who knew that wherever he went his gifts went with him; but I could not let well alone.

"I am so sorry," I said.

"Are you sorry for that poor Eugène Herbert who wanted style?" he asked, gayly. "Don't be sorry. True, he spent some bitter hours after he left you, but you see he has outlived them."

Then he had been unhappy—of course he had. Was he so still? I did not venture to put the question, but, without looking at him, I said:

"Would you have come last night, if you had known whom you were to meet?"

"Why not?" he promptly answered; then in a lower tone he added, "he can dare much who knows how to suffer, Miss Carr."

Involuntarily I looked up at him; but his face, once so open, told me nothing. I read in it neither past nor present pain—nothing but the careless stoicism with which a man meets, or should meet, the inevitable troubles of life. I did not venture on another word.

The water was now boiling. Ellinor, who seemed to be a thorough little housewife, made the tea in an old metal tea-pot, set three blue cups and saucers on the table, cut some bread and butter, then drew a high chair forward, and, perching herself upon it, took her tea with us.

The rain had almost ceased, the gray sky was clearing, and a yellow yet pleasant sun was sending in his flickering light through the kitchen-window on the floor, when Mr. Herbert, who sat facing me, suddenly remarked:

"I hope Mrs. Henry de Lusignan is quite well to-day."

I had forgotten her—not for long, but for a few minutes she had left my mind, and the question recalled her back so abruptly and so painfully, that I nervously set down the tea-pot, from which I was pouring myself out some tea.

"She is gone to London," I said, shunning his look. "Her luggage was lost, and Watkins is very ill, it seems."

"Did she take Harry?" he asked, eagerly.

"Oh, of course." I uttered the reply with my face almost in my cup. After a while I looked up. Mr. Herbert was leaning back in his chair, with his untasted tea before him, and an expression of the greatest gravity on his face. He was looking at the fire, yet he seemed aware that my

eyes were reading his countenance, for all at once his look sought mine.

"The bird found the cage open and took wing," he said in a low tone. "I guessed last night that it would be so."

I answered not one word. Little Ellinor, though conscientiously going through her tea and bread-and-butter, was scanning us very attentively, and listening to every word we uttered.

"I think it is not raining now," I said, when our silent meal was over.

"No, it is not," he answered, still looking very thoughtful. He rose. It was plain he meant to see me home. I would rather have returned alone; it was agonizing to think of Miss Dunn seeing me come back under his escort. Oh! if I could have told him so! But as I could not, I submitted to my fate with that resigned stupidity which is one of the many sheepish attributes of youth.

Mr. Herbert did not suspect or did not care for the predicament he was putting me into. He stood patient, but evidently waiting, while I put on my water-proof, shook hands with Ellinor, and lingered as long as I could. Vain delay! When I left the mill he left it too, and, as we walked out, he scarcely waited for the door to close upon us, before he said:

"So she is gone—gone at last! Shall we ever see her again, Miss Carr? I think not. I think she has vanished forever, like any lost star. God bless her, wherever she may go!"

There was much emotion in his voice. I stood still and looked at him.

"Why should you not follow and discover her?" I asked, eagerly. "If she is gone, you can find her—"

"You know where she is!" he interrupted, with a sudden change in his face.

"No," I replied, slowly and much grieved to damp his ardor. "I do not; but surely—surely you can discover her."

Mr. Herbert's countenance resumed its tranquil expression at once.

"Then she did not tell even you where she was going," he remarked—"not even you."

"I did not see her. I was asleep, and she did not like to waken me, I suppose."

"And that was your parting! She left you to Miss Russell and Miss Dunn!—and left you in your sleep, without one last word!"

I felt ready to cry, and I also felt very angry with Mr. Herbert, who made the hard truth still harder to bear.

"And what if she did!" I cried, wrathfully. "Is it her fault if every one *will* worry her to

death, and she must fly like a poor hunted thing! I know she has been true to me. I know that when I lay ill, and almost dying, she sat up night after night to mind me. I know that, and want to know no more. She is lost to me now, but she may not be lost to you; if you want her, follow her; and if you find her, Mr. Herbert, tell her I love her still—tell her I shall love her till I die.”

I was crying now, and had to turn my head away. Mr. Herbert answered me not one word, but when I was calm again, gave me his arm, and so we walked on, in a silence that was not very friendly, till we reached Hanvil House. At the gate Mr. Herbert (to my great relief) left me. He said something about his splashed boots, and not being in a plight to appear before Miss Russell; and so we parted. I looked after him; he walked away from Gray's House, and in the direction of the railway.

“He is going to follow Elizabeth,” I thought, with a beating heart. I went up to my room, at once, and changed my wet garments; then I went down to the drawing-room, ready to confront Miss Dunn. I was determined to be browbeaten again, and felt quite valiant, not to say aggressive. But is it not always so in life—when we are ready for an emergency, the emergency does not occur? Miss Dunn, as if she knew that I was bent on mischief, prudently remained up-stairs with Miss Russell; and when I entered the drawing-room, the only company I found there was that of the fire burning steadily in the grate. The room looked large, lonely, and rather desolate. I felt tired and feverish; I ensconced myself within a deep arm-chair by one of the windows, and looked out on the garden. It was raining again, and the heavy drops dashed against the window-panes. The wind, too, moaned gustily, with long fits of silence. “Will he find her?” I thought. I hoped he would. I hoped that Elizabeth would prize this faithful heart at last. I saw her relenting, I imagined them going off together somewhere forever away. I cried a little, and I suppose I cried myself to sleep.

I do not think I slept long. When I woke with a start, the room was almost dark—not through the lateness of the hour, but because of the blackness of the sky. The fire burned red and low, and there were long streaks of gloom on the carpet. All of a sudden the house was full of noise; the drawing-room door flew open, the light from the lamp in the hall came pouring in, and in that light the two figures of Mr. de Lusignan and Elizabeth entered abruptly.

“Well,” she said, shutting the door and keeping her hand upon it as if to prevent him from escaping, “we are alone now, sir, and you shall hear me. You set a trap for me, and I fell into it, as you imagine. Do not think I did so with my eyes shut. I knew the risk I ran, and if I ran it, it is because to be free from you was worth any risk.”

“That, at least, is candid,” remarked Mr. de Lusignan, dryly.

Elizabeth went up to Miss Russell's vacant chair, threw herself into it, and thence, looking at him defiantly, she asked:

“Well, now that you have me, what will you do with me?”

“Admire you, my dear, of course,” was his ironical reply, “and take to heart the lesson you have given me. I wanted to know if I could trust you alone with my grandson, and I cannot. I shall bear it in mind.”

All this time I had been too much amazed to stir, but now I started up and ran to Elizabeth.

“O Elizabeth! Elizabeth!” was all I could say, throwing my arms around her neck and kissing her. It was very selfish of me, but I could not help being glad at seeing her again.

“Why, Bessie! is that you?” she exclaimed, and her manner changed as if by magic. “Only think of the trick Watkins played upon me!—the foolish thing fancied she was desperately ill, when a bad cold was all that ailed her! Chance—or rather, I should say, Providence”—the word was uttered with slight bitterness—“made Mr. de Lusignan and me meet at the station, so he kindly took all trouble from my hands, managed Watkins, managed Harry, managed my luggage even—and here we are! Is it not lucky?”

And she laughed so lightly and so gayly that I was both amazed and perplexed.

“And where is Miss Russell, in whose chair I am sitting?” resumed Elizabeth. “Ill in her room?—what a blessing! And Miss Dunn presides, does she? Well, then, I suppose I really must go up-stairs and dress.”

She rose, passed by me with a nod, and left the room. I remained alone with my guardian, who seemed to have forgotten me. I reminded him of my existence, by inquiring after Made-moiselle Aubrey.

“She is very well, I believe,” he replied; “and you are well too, Bessie, I see,” he added, holding out his hand; then, without giving me time to utter a word, “I saw Mr. Herbert, as we were driving from the station. What is he doing

here?—painting? Has he long turned up in this part of the world?"

I confess I enjoyed my reply, which I uttered with studied indifference.

"Only since he bought Gray's House, I believe."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. de Lusignan.

"Only since he bought Gray's House," I repeated.

My guardian remained silent a few minutes; his eyes were bent on the carpet; he raised them at last:

"So he is a rich man now?" he said. "I had forgotten all about that concern of his. Does he come here?"

"He dined here yesterday."

"And the other guests were—oh! the Grays. That will do; I know the set. Well, I too must go up and dress for Miss Dunn, I suppose."

He left me, to my great relief, and I ran up to Elizabeth at once. I was not sure that she wanted to see me, but I could not help it—I must go to her. I found her sitting alone opposite the mirror on the toilet-table, as if she wanted to read the face that looked back at her from its cold and careless depths.

"May I come in?" I asked, from the door.

"Yes, darling," she answered, without looking round—"come in."

I went up to her, and knelt down on the floor by her side. She laid her head on my shoulder, and moaned drearily:

"O Bessie, Bessie," she said, "what a good thing it would be for me, if I could only be dead!—and I am still so young!—so young! Not twenty-four!"

"And Harry?" I suggested.

"Oh, never mind Harry," she exclaimed, pettishly. "Would not Mr. de Lusignan do for him? Good gracious!" she added with a start, "there's the dinner-bell. Go away, darling—go away. I must dress, you know."

I left her, for she seemed in a great hurry; but she made good speed, and when she came down, a quarter of an hour later, charmingly dressed and as lovely as ever, it would have been hard to detect a wish for death on her beautiful face. She came, too, quite prepared for Miss Dunn; and, when that lady imprudently made a stealthy attack upon her outer works, Elizabeth repelled it with a vigor which showed that her heart was in the warfare, and did not retire from the field till her enemy was thoroughly routed. As for Mr. de Lusignan and me, we looked on, on the wise and humane principle of non-intervention.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE afternoon was pitilessly hot. A burning July afternoon was this, which had mistaken its time and come in May, with a blue sky, no clouds, a parched earth, and grass so green and glistening that it made one feel hotter still to see it. Grass can look very moist and cool at evening-time, when flowers shut up and go to sleep, and pale mists steal forth and float over the earth, like sad spirits weeping balmy tears as they pass on; but at noon-time, when every blade is straight and stiff like a little spear, and the very daisies lift up defiantly to the sun their shield of silver and gold, grass is hot, and has a hot look. The very waters by which I sat were bright and shining, and only gave back light and heat. I found it trying to sit thus looking at them; but I was too lazy to rise and walk to the house through a tract of burning sunshine. With moral cowardice, however, I shrank from the responsibility of either going or staying. Insidiously I appealed to my companion, Harry, who sat gravely by my side, his little fat legs stretched out rather wide apart, and his stumpy little feet in red shoes turned up.

"Too 'ot," he sententiously repeated, throwing a white pebble into the water.

"Then shall we stay here till dinner?" I continued.

"Es, till dinner," echoed Harry, picking out another pebble and throwing it in.

The matter being thus decided, I took up my book once more, then let it fall again before five minutes were over.

I find it hard to read when Nature and I are alone together. I say alone, though Harry was with me, for a child has the happy gift of not being company. A mind speaking to me through the medium of a printed page is too little or too much. Nature—bright, joyous, life-teeming Nature—bids me be all her own, and I obey her, no unwilling slave. I know there are some whom Nature never calls; no mysterious music comes forth from the forest depths, alluring them within—no winding path tempts them through shade and sunshine—no charm of form or color bids them pause, as if to say, "Behold me!"—no voice seems to speak from the depths of the tranquil lake, or in the murmurs of the garrulous brook. I believe these can read anywhere with perfect comfort to themselves. They could read on Mont Blanc or in Innisfallen; but, right or wrong, I cannot, and the little lake by which I now sat had so long a tale to tell to me, that no other story could tempt me away.

It had wholly escaped my knowledge during

the first days of our stay at Hanvil House; a remark of my guardian's first revealed its existence to me.

"I hope Harry does not go near that water," he said on the morning after his arrival, and Miss Dunn immediately rejoined, "Oh! I hope not—horrid thing!"

"Water!—what water?" I asked; and I went and found it out, and my guardian's prohibition, like many another before it, led to the accomplishment of the event he apprehended. I had given up going to look at Gray's House for good reasons, but I went and found out the little lake, and visited it daily; and Harry was now actually by its shores with me.

It was so pretty! A little fairy sheet of glancing waters, with broken, uneven shores, now half hidden by young trees. Here and there rushes and water-lilies reared their heads above its surface, then seemed to dip down again as if they liked better being within, under the cool water, than out and up in the hot sun. A brown rock, with a round mossy cap of a bright golden green, glittered in the distance like a fairy islet. That was all, but it was much to me, such as it was; moreover, the hand of man had not set it there. It was a true lake, no counterfeit; it was my first lake too, and had to me a charm very different from that of the little running stream by Ellinor's mill. For the brook, as it bounds along, tells us of life, motion, adventure, and infinite variety. Fancy follows its glancing current, and wonders whither it is going—what pastoral landscapes, what villages it passes by, what cities it seeks (ah, how unwisely!), in short, what it means to do on its way through the world. The lake uses other language. Its mystery lies inward. Hence old stories make it the scene of enchantment which live running waters break. In the lake you will find O'Donoghue's palace, and many a Prince of Tierna Oge. The lake keeps King Arthur's sword, and guards his sleep. Its deep waters tell us none of its secrets. We do not trust it quite, yet we cannot resist its smile; and as I looked at this one now, I thought of Elizabeth—beautiful, charming, and unfathomable—of Elizabeth, who, since the day that followed her return with Mr. de Lusignan, had been lying ill of fever. She would see no doctor—she said she was not ill enough for that, but she kept her room, and sometimes her bed; and when she attempted to come down on an evening, she was as brilliant and lively as ever, but invariably was ill again the next morning. But Harry, who took no pleasure in silent meditations, here rather pettishly put an end to mine by imperiously saying:

"Gi' me de book, gi' me de moder-o'-pearl!"

Which, translated into English, meant, "Give me your mother-of-pearl card-case."

"I have not got it here, Harry!" I replied; then, suddenly starting up, I cried: "O Harry, Harry! I have lost it! I must have lost it!"

I was more distressed than I can say. That little mother-of-pearl card-case was the last gift I had received from James Carr. His hand had put it into mine before he had learned to doubt me, and I never looked at it but the happy days it recalled all came back before me. And now it was gone, really gone. I remembered distinctly that I had put it into my pocket before going out on the day of Elizabeth's flight, and that pocket I had emptied of its contents an hour ago. I must have lost it, but how or where? Perhaps at the mill. Hope asked no better than to revive at the suggestion. I started to my feet, and, spite the vehement opposition of Harry, who, if he wanted the mother-of-pearl book, wanted it then and there, I insisted upon going back to the house at once; and, having in my hands the last argument of kings and nations, force, I had my way, spite some vehement protests in the way of kicking and scratching, which Harry administered with a vigor and zeal worthy of a better fate. We had not walked a hundred yards before we met Mr. de Lusignan.

"So you were there—really there, by that horrible water with the child!" he exclaimed, pale with emotion and wrath at seeing that we came from the forbidden lake. "Have I not said that he was never to go nigh it, never!"

"We did not intend it," I faltered, rather frightened at seeing him in such a fury, "but I took him from Watkins because Elizabeth is so ill that I thought she might want her."

"And you had a book!" he exclaimed, looking at the volume in my hand; "and, while you were reading your trashy novel, the boy might have fallen in, and—Bessie, Bessie, you do not know what that child is to me! He is all that is left to me now—from the wreck of a wasted life."

He took the boy's hand as he spoke, and, leaving me there abashed and mute, he walked away. I took a round in order to avoid him as I went back to the house, but failed in my object. The very path I chose led me straight to a shady portion of the flower-garden, where Harry and his grandfather were seated on a bench discussing the lake. The boy, who was quick enough in his way, and who knew that I had been scolded about him, took care to say, in a loud voice, as I passed:

"Bessie 'ad a book, and I got into de water."

"Nonsense!" said his grandfather, looking vexed; "you did not, Harry."

"I did!" screamed Harry, getting very red in the face, and clinching his fists as if he were ready for battle; "ou know I did!—'ou said I did!"

My guardian did not venture to contradict the little tyrant, under whose yoke he had placed his stiff neck. I was magnanimous, and, feigning deafness, walked on.

All search in my room for the card-case proved vain, as I had expected that it would. My only chance now lay at the mill, and to it I went at once, regardless of the heat.

The mill was silent, and seemed deserted; the door stood wide open, but there was not a soul about the place. It looked as if corn had never been ground there! I remained on the threshold, and called out "Ellinor!" No one answered me save the tabby cat, who came down-stairs humping her back, lifting up her tail, and uttering a pitiful mew, which might be a mew of welcome, for all I could tell. I tried the parlor-door, but it was locked; not without some uneasiness, I made my way to the kitchen, and, opening the door cautiously, I peeped in—Ellinor was not there. There was no one there save Mr. Herbert, who stood by the window, looking at something in his hand. My heart leaped with joy, as I recognized my property.

"Oh! I am so glad you have got it!" I eagerly exclaimed, coming forward. "I was so much afraid that I had lost it."

Mr. Herbert looked round, and handed me my card-case, with a smile.

"I saw it was yours," he said, "and I was going to take it to you. I have only just found it here."

"And I have only just missed it; and I am so glad to have found it! James gave it to me, and I value it all the more that he and I are no longer friends."

Mr. Herbert was putting the card-case into my hand as I said this; he raised his surprised eyes to mine, with a doubtful and perplexed meaning on his face—the meaning of one who hears, but can scarcely trust his hearing.

"No," I replied, "we have not met since we parted in Fontainebleau—did you think we had? Don't you know that James is gone to Australia?"

Mr. Herbert bowed his head in silent assent; I reddened. I felt as if he were blaming me, and yet, if James and I were parted forever, the fault was surely none of mine!

"We are not friends," I repeated, "and shall never be friends again; but I am all the better pleased to have his gift once more—and thank you cordially, Mr. Herbert."

"You owe me little thanks," he said, smiling, perhaps at my formal tone. "I have been away from home since you left this here, otherwise you should have had it earlier."

I started with sudden recollection:

"Perhaps you do not know that Elizabeth has come back?" I said, eagerly.

"No, indeed!" he exclaimed, taken by surprise; "come back! I did not know that."

"It was impossible you should find her," I continued, heedlessly; "she came back with Mr. de Lusignan on the very day that you went off to look for her."

"But, excuse me," he said, very gravely; "I have not been looking for her. I have neither the right nor the inclination to do so," he added, so coldly that I remained silent and abashed before him.

How well I remember that moment! Mr. Herbert and I stood on the sunlit kitchen-floor, looking at each other, calm reproaches in the eyes, and assuredly some confusion in mine. I thought only of the vexation of the moment, and all the time Grief, like a keen marksman, was lying in wait for me, and biding his hour. I was going to say something, I do not know what, when a series of little steps came pattering down the stairs, the kitchen-door, which I had left ajar, was burst open, and a little red-haired girl in black rushed in, and, running up to Mr. Herbert, without heeding me, she cried, in a passion of sobs and tears:

"O Georgy!—Ellinor won't; she says she won't, Georgy—"

"Won't what, Polly?" he asked, rather gravely.

This, then, was Polly! I looked at her curiously, then, uttering a sudden, sharp cry of fear and pain, I recognized her.

"O Polly, Polly!" I cried, "what brings you here? Where is James?—where is he?"

Polly turned round her little surprised face toward me, while Mr. Herbert, whose right hand rested kindly on the child's head, gave me a look of silent pity. James was dead! I read it in his face, in Polly's black garments—above all, in her presence here. The blow was terrible. It fell upon me like a bolt from heaven; my arms dropped, James's little gift slipped from my hand upon the floor, and broke as it fell. I did not fall myself, but I felt turned to stone, and, looking at Mr. Herbert, all I could say was:

"Dead!—James is dead!"

I could not cry then. The tears, which came later and relieved me, seemed forever dried up in their source, but a pain so acute that it was like the agonized parting of soul and body seized me.

"James—dear James!" I said; and sitting down on a chair that stood by me, I laid my head upon the table and moaned aloud in my anguish. That, too, went by. After a while I could look up again, and question and listen. The tale Mr. Herbert had to tell me was both sad and brief.

"When I left Fontainebleau last year," he said, "I went to Australia, as you know."

I shook my head. I had known nothing of the kind.

"My stay was a short one. Almost on the eve of my return home I received a message from James Carr, asking to see me. I went, of course. I found him dying of a fever, contracted by the sick-bed of his two eldest sisters, who had already died of it a week before. Polly alone had escaped—perhaps because she had been removed from the house in time. James knew that I was in Sydney—he remembered that we were related, and had been friends, and maybe he felt on his death-bed that he had wronged me, and he now asked me to care for the child. I promised to do so, and that is how I got Polly," he added, caressing Polly's little red head.

"Did James give you no message for me?" I asked.

Mr. Herbert hesitated.

"He mentioned you," he replied, "but he sent no message."

I did not ask what James had said of me. He had done tardy justice to Mr. Herbert, but I guessed that for me there had been none. To the end James had wronged me.

"And that was how James died," I said. "He who was so young still, so strong—that was how he died!"

"Yes," sadly said Mr. Herbert, "that was how, and his hardest tribulation in his last hours which I witnessed was the not seeing his little Polly again. 'If I could only see her!' he moaned—'if I could only see her—the last of the three—the only one left—if I could only see her!'"

The words brought him back so vividly before me; his kind, loving face as he sat in Mrs. Dawson's parlor with his three little sisters around him, was so present to me, as Mr. Herbert spoke, that the tears rushed to my eyes, and flowed down my cheeks.

"O Mr. Herbert," I said, when I could speak, "you must give me Polly, indeed you must. I

will care for her truly. I will rear her, and keep her and provide for her—for though you do not say so, I see very well that James had nothing to leave to her."

"No, poor fellow, not a farthing—it was all gone."

"Well, then, let me have her," I pleaded. "I know you are rich and generous, but James was my cousin, and surely the task of rearing his little sister, the only one left, as he said, belongs to me."

Mr. Herbert hesitated, but did not deny my prayer; he only remarked:

"You forget that you are not your own mistress, and that Mr. de Lusignan, who so strangely left you in ignorance of your cousin's death, may object to your assuming such a burden, and undertaking such a task."

"If he consents, do you?" I asked, rather impetuously.

"Yes," he answered, without the least hesitation.

"Well, then, he is within now—will you come with me and ask him at once?"

I rose as I spoke. I felt as if a moment's delay were more than I could bear—as if to have Polly, and have her immediately, were the only comfort my grief could know.

"I will do any thing you wish," he answered, readily.

"Well, then, I do wish that," I replied, with some passion. "What else have I left to wish for? You do not know—how should you, since he did not?—what James Carr was to me!"

Mr. Herbert did not answer this; he took Polly by the hand, and we left the cottage together. Ellinor, who, after her difference with Polly, had remained up-stairs, looked out after us from a bedroom-window, and saw us depart with a blank, perplexed face.

An hour's time had not altered the road between the cottage and Hanvil House, but that hour, so full of sorrow to me, had so changed its aspect in my eyes, that it was as if I had never trod these paths, as if I had never seen these fields and meadows before. Twice I had to sit down and cry, my heart was so full; and once while Polly was hunting butterflies, I said to Mr. Herbert, who stood silent by my side:

"You say that James mentioned me. What did he say?"

"I will tell you, if you wish it," he replied, "but I would rather you did not ask me."

"And so he was angry with me to the end?" I said, disconsolately. "O Mr. Herbert, that is very hard! I loved him so truly, and if he had

not been so exacting, I would have married him—indeed I would!”

“He could not help being exacting,” remarked Mr. Herbert, rather quickly.

“But don’t you know,” I argued; “poor, dear James really asked too much.”

“No, Miss Carr,” very positively said Mr. Herbert; “he only asked for the one thing which you could not give—if he had got it, James would have been content.”

“So you too blame me!” I exclaimed, drearily—“even you think I wronged him!”

“No, no; I never said that! Do I not say you could not give him what he wanted? Do not blame yourself, Bessie; the thing James Carr wanted was no more in your power to bestow than it was in Elizabeth’s for me.”

“But you are not angry with Elizabeth,” I persisted—“I can see you are not; and James was angry with me to the end, and that is hard.”

I was looking up at him as I spoke. I saw the tell-tale blood rush up to his face, and dye it; he crimsoned, even to the roots of his fair hair; he laughed, with a light, forced laugh, and half turned his head away, as if to look at Polly, as he replied, in a rather vexed tone:

“You judge me too favorably, Miss Carr.”

He was not cured, after all; I had always thought so, spite his implied denial, and I was not surprised. At another time I might have challenged his confidence, but now my own sorrow was heavy. James was dead, and I could think of no one’s loves and hopes, when he who had loved me so truly, though so unkindly, lay in his grave across the seas. Mr. Herbert did not want me to think of him or his concerns.

“Are you sure that the child will not be too much for you?” he asked, seriously. “To me she is no trouble. I shall send her to school soon, and I have got a maid for her, in the mean while; but if you mean to keep her—”

“I mean to keep her, and she will be no trouble,” I interrupted. “I may have to send her to school till I am of age, but, after that, Polly shall remain with me till she is grown up.”

Mr. Herbert attempted no further argument. I rose, and we spoke no more till we reached Hanvil House. My guardian stood in the shade with his back toward us, superintending the building of a mud-and-pebble edifice which Harry was raising, to the infinite detriment of his garments.

“You are all wrong, Harry,” Mr. de Lusignan was saying, “your castle will fall at the enemy’s first shot—look!”

He took a stone, aimed it with a sure hand,

and down tumbled the fortress which Harry had been rearing with some trouble. The boy took the experiment very ill, and, uttering a cry of mingled anger and dismay, he flew at his grandfather to put in practice the ever-readiest argument of children. Mr. de Lusignan laughed, put him away, and, turning round as he did so, saw Mr. Herbert, Polly, and me.

Our aspect sobered him at once, and even Harry suspended his attack in the first moment of surprise. I think also there was something in my grief too visible to escape my guardian’s perception. I saw his face change as he advanced to greet Mr. Herbert, and his look fell with a troubled, perplexed meaning upon Polly. Mr. Herbert was quite at his ease. His manner was quiet, his speech was courteous, his look was free; but Mr. de Lusignan remained strangely constrained, and still kept looking at Polly and me. I spoke first:

“My cousin, James Carr, is dead, sir,” I said; “did you know it?”

He did not answer; I resumed:

“I think it hard, sir, very hard, that you did not let me know the death of my only surviving relative.”

“Oh, of course!” replied Mr. de Lusignan, frowning, and with a slight, impatient gesture of his hand; “you think many things hard, Bessie. You thought it hard once that I would not let you marry Mr. Carr off-hand. However good and estimable he may have been, did you think me so much mistaken some months later?”

This was all very true, but I only felt that to save himself the sight of my sad face and black garments, Mr. de Lusignan had wilfully kept me ignorant of James Carr’s death.

“I had a right to know that my cousin was dead,” I retorted. “I had a right to know it.”

“You kept none,” coldly answered my guardian; “you parted from him with reproaches on your lips, and there was no reconciliation. He left you no legacy, no memorial, that I am aware of, and the only information which I, as your guardian, got on this matter, was the ‘Deaths,’ in the *Times*.”

I nearly broke down at this unkind reminder of the past, but I controlled myself, and answered as calmly as I could:

“James had nothing to leave, sir, save Polly, his only surviving sister. Mr. Herbert got her in Australia, and brought her back, but surely I have the best right to adopt her and provide for her. I cannot do so yet without your consent. Will you give it?”

“Is she any relation of yours?” he asked.

"None. She was James's half-sister; but I shall love her dearly for his sake."

I expected a sharp and prompt denial; I had all sorts of arguments in readiness; but to my surprise my guardian said, very gently:

"You shall please yourself, Bessie."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" I cried, in sudden joy; and, turning round to Polly, I took her up in my arms and kissed her, while Harry, who had been slowly reconnoitring Mr. Herbert, crept up to him and looked up in his face with shy recognition. What passed then in Polly's mind? Did she imagine that an exchange was going to take place—that I was to have a Polly, and Mr. Herbert was to get a Harry instead? Did she consider my embrace as a sort of immediate taking of possession of her little person by me, and was she affronted at being thus disposed of without her consent? Heaven knows, certain it is that, when I thus kissed her, Polly struggled for liberty, got out of my arms, and, bursting into a flood of tears, rushed back to Mr. Herbert, vehemently pushing Harry away.

"I won't go with her!" she sobbed; "I won't—O Georgy—I won't go with her!"

She clung to his legs, and then turning round scowled at me, and, viciously giving poor Harry a kick, she screamed indignantly: "You go away—will you?"

I was so confounded at this rebuff that I could not utter one word. As for Harry, so valiant with his grandfather, he looked perfectly terrified at this unexpected assault of his little red-haired enemy, and fled in evident dread of a fresh attack. Mr. de Lusignan laughed rather drearily.

"Is that your luck, Bessie?" he said. "Then give up Polly, Mignonne, give her up."

I did not answer. My disappointment was too bitter and too keen. At this moment, moreover, two new personages came upon the scene—Miss Russell wheeled in her yellow chair by Miss Dunn, who, having seen us from afar—Miss Russell was short-sighted—had imparted her own curiosity to her patroness.

"What has happened?" asked Miss Russell, bending forward eagerly; "a battle-royal between that young lady and Harry! Miss Carr in tears!—Mr. Herbert, have you caused her grief?"

"I hope not," he answered, smiling at this abrupt address. "I hope, too, you are quite well to-day, Miss Russell."

"Oh, very well, thank you—pray excuse my rudeness, but you know me, I am the most uncivilized person—" (how true, I thought!)—"and now do tell me what has happened."

"Simply that Mignonne wanted to adopt this young lady, who prefers Mr. Herbert's guardianship to hers," sarcastically answered Mr. de Lusignan.

"Come, Polly, let us have your mind once more—will you go with Miss Carr, or—"

"I'll die first," interrupted Polly, giving me a very evil look.

"Stay with Mr. Herbert," continued my guardian.

"Oh, yes, I'll stay with Georgy," very readily said Polly.

Mr. de Lusignan laughed.

"Why, what a charmer you are, Mr. Herbert!" he said.

"But Mr. Herbert is such a charmer," here remarked Miss Dunn. "I remember that all pups and kittens and birds used to like him so much."

All this time Mr. Herbert's hand was caressing Polly's head, as it lay resting against him. When Miss Dunn spoke thus, he looked up at her and smiled, but said not one word. I do not know by what intuition I guessed the meaning in his eyes, nor in what spirit of mischief I remarked suddenly:

"Did they not also like you, Miss Dunn?"

"Not much," she answered, coolly.

"Not much!" screamed Miss Russell; "my dear, cats, dogs, and children, all hate you! Look at Harry, he can't bear you, can he? As to birds," she added, musingly, "I don't know—perhaps birds like you."

"Not much," imperturbably replied Miss Dunn. "I have no doubt they come and perch on Mr. Herbert's head, but they never come to me."

Mr. Herbert smiled again; if Miss Dunn had been a bird herself, pecking at him in her puny malice, she could not have moved him less than she did. I felt—rather late, it is true—that I had helped to bring this on; my heart was full of other things, and, turning to him, I said, in a low tone:

"You were right, I see. Polly must stay with you, Mr. Herbert—thank you all the same." And, having said this, I walked away with my sorrow and left them so.

I went up to my room; I laid my head on my pillow and stayed thus till dusk; then I stole in to Elizabeth. She was up, sitting by her open window, gazing drearily at the sullen sky—for the hot day looked as if it would end in stormy rain. I took a cushion, put it at her feet, and, sitting down upon it, I laid my head upon her lap, and said:

"I am very miserable, Elizabeth."

"Are you, Mignonne?" she replied, stooping over me; "what has happened?"

"James is dead." I burst into a passion of sobs and tears as I said it.

"Dead! O Bessie, is that possible? How do you know it?"

I told her. I told her also how I wanted to take and keep Polly, who had chosen to abide with Mr. Herbert, and I said again:

"I am very miserable, Elizabeth."

"Poor little thing!—I dare say you are," she rejoined, kindly.

"I am the most miserable creature alive," I added with a sob.

"No, Bessie," she replied, drearily. "I know one who is more wretched than you are."

I gazed up in her pale face. Oh, how sad, how very sad it looked in that gray light! What depths of despair there were in her blue eyes! What lines of unspeakable sorrow in her compressed lips! I asked if she would go down to dinner; Elizabeth shook her head in denial.

"Then let me stay with you," I entreated. "I cannot go down and talk; besides, where is the use? I could not eat a morsel—I feel I could not."

Elizabeth raised no objection. So I stayed thus with her, my head lying on her lap, and her hand resting upon it as she leaned back in her chair, looking with her sad eyes at the evening sky. It soon began to rain. Oh, how soothing I felt this weeping and wailing of Nature! I liked that low moaning wind, and those heavy drops pattering upon the young leaves of the trees! Was it raining upon James's grave? Where was it? I wondered; in what sort of a spot? Were there roses near it? Did roses grow in Australia?—such roses as he had set for me in the home that was to have been mine? And so my thoughts wandered, and my tears flowed at every picture memory called back, till, worn out and weary, I unconsciously fell asleep. When I woke it was quite dark; the window was still open, but the rain had ceased, and the evening was as sultry as ever.

"Elizabeth," I said, softly, "are you awake?"

"Yes, darling," she answered, quietly.

"Did you not sleep?"

"Oh, no."

"And you stayed quiet all this time?"

"Why not? You were sleeping, and I knew it would do you so much good."

I rose and kissed her. I felt as if, in our mutual sorrow, all the old affection had come

back. I felt as if we both, Elizabeth and I, could now grieve apart from other happy ones, and make our moan above the two graves of our dead.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE next day was Sunday. I woke early, and dressed at once to go to the little Catholic church which stood some three miles away at the end of the village. I took a rose out of my hat. I put on the only black dress I had, and, having thus sobered my aspect, I went down-stairs and left the house alone, and without meeting any one save a house-maid. My road took me through meadows, where cows who stood knee-deep in the grass, grazed on steadily, as if life had no other object to them than the production of butter and milk. How beautiful were those meadows! How gorgeous looked the crimson fields of sainfoin! How tender and lovely was the aspect of that early sky! How low and dim and dreary lay the far horizon! And alas, alas! how heavy felt my sorrowful heart! For I remembered another Sunday morning, when James and I had gone through Kensington Gardens together, arm-in-arm, on our way to Spanish Place. I remembered the deep shadow of the old trees, the bright sunshine on the grass, his handsome young face turned to mine, the very stillness of the church, the aspect of the altar, the look of the white-headed priest who preached, and the text of his sermon—all returned to me like things of yesterday, and with them the burden of my grief: Dead, dead!

James was dead forever. There was no cancelling that doom. Separation, estrangement, are bitter, but the gates are not closed, or, if they are, there is always a gleam of light stealing through the chinks. We know that these doors, fast as they may seem, can be unlocked again, but what ray of this world has ever pierced the utter darkness of the grave? The other life indeed is eloquent with tender promises, but this life, with its hopes and dreams and passions and vicissitudes, is silent, so far as the dead are concerned. I tried to take my mind away from these thoughts in the chapel, but I could not; do what I would, they came back to me. Grief is the great master whom we must all obey. My eyes read, but my mind was not with words on the printed page; my ears heard the voice of the priest, but it sounded far away, as if it came to me through a dream; I knelt, but my body alone obeyed that

form of worship; only one thing I could do, and that I did—oh, how passionately, how eagerly, as my tears flowed behind my veil!—and that was, to pray for James Carr.

As I left the chapel and crossed the porch, I found myself face to face with Mr. Herbert and Polly. On seeing me, the child shrank behind him.

"You need not, Polly," I said, in a subdued voice. "I will never again attempt to take you away. You were not given to me, and no doubt James knew best."

My voice shook a little as I uttered his name, but otherwise I think I bore up pretty well. Save that he asked me kindly enough how I was, Mr. Herbert made no allusion to what had passed between us the day before. He walked by me for a little while, Polly keeping safely on the other side of him; and we spoke of any thing save that one thing which was ever before me; then, when our roads parted, he left me.

I did not bid Polly good-by, for by her bearing Polly plainly showed me that she could not so readily forget the unlucky attempt I had made to adopt her; but with a heavy heart I looked after her as she danced by Mr. Herbert's side. She had been the darling of James Carr, and how hard he must have found it to leave her behind him! If I only could have had her, if I only could have petted and cherished her for his sake!—but he had been angry with me to the last, and that too was hard.

Sorrow is a heavy burden to carry. I soon felt weary, and sat down on a bank to rest. Sunday stillness was on the spot. The fields were all very quiet, not a soul was within view; the air was still, save when wild-bees, reckless of Sabbath observance, hovered over the meadow, gathering honey with a low hum. I looked around me, and tried to feel the beauty of God's world, but could not, for the dead one, estranged, reproachful, and dying far away, was ever by me, upbraiding me with the days that were gone.

"Oh! if he had only forgiven me!" I thought, "if he only had!" And because he had not, and I knew it, I buried my face in my hands, and cried bitterly. The sound of a step roused me suddenly. I looked round quickly. Mr. Herbert was coming toward me, but Polly was not with him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I have something to say which could not be said in Polly's presence. Her maid came for her, so I turned back to speak to you. May I do so?"

"Yes, surely," I replied, hesitatingly.

"I mean to send Polly to school," he said;

"tell me where you are to be, and Polly shall go to school as near you as can be managed."

"And will you do this?" I cried, joyfully. "Oh, how good you are! O Mr. Herbert, how can I thank you sufficiently?"

"Then you like this plan?" he said, kindly.

"Like it! O Mr. Herbert, can I wish for more? And I will do my best for Polly. Oh, you may rely upon that. I shall go and see her every Sunday, and take her out walking, and try to improve her. I shall make her presents, give her books, good books; then pretty things to please her—dolls while she is little, and, when she grows up, a handsome desk or a work-box, or a dressing-case, or any thing of the kind; and then, perhaps, when I am of age, Polly will like me enough to come and stay with me forever."

"Forever!" he repeated, rather gravely.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," I cried, "I am so selfish. I must not rob you of Polly—I must not!"

Mr. Herbert smiled, and begged that I would have no scruple on that head. He was fond of Polly, to be sure, but he was also afraid of spoiling her, which would be a pity. I was alarmed at the prospect, and begged that he would not spoil Polly—dear James did so object to spoiled children.

"But what am I to do?" he asked. "Polly will not learn, and Polly will get on my back and pull my hair."

"Punish her," I said, inexorably.

"But how so? I cannot whip Polly"—I was horrified at the suggestion—"or put her on bread-and-water"—this was as bad as the whipping—"and for scolding, Polly does not care."

"Put her in a corner," I suggested.

Mr. Herbert's eyes were so full of fun at this educational view that, with the prompt response of youth, I burst out laughing; but the laughter died on my lips, and, turning my head aside, I cried anew.

"Oh, what a wretch I am!" I exclaimed. "I have not learned his death twenty-four hours, and I can laugh!—I can laugh! He would not have laughed if any one had told him, 'Your little cousin Bessie is dead.' It would have broken his heart—I know it would, for he always loved me ten times more than I loved him."

Mr. Herbert let me sob my grief away; then, when I was calm again, he said:

"It seems to me that you loved him very much."

"Of what use was my love, since he did not believe in it?" I asked. "O Mr. Herbert, my very heart is pierced with regret and remorse. I now see what a blank life is without James Carr."

Oh! do not do as I did. If she has offended you, forgive her, and, since you have found her again, try to win her back, or your heart will ache some day, as mine aches now."

Mr. Herbert looked at me, then bit his lip, and turned his head away. If I had not been absorbed in my sorrow, I must have seen how displeased he was; but I did not. It was only later that the meaning of his cold, averted looks came back to me; yet I had a vague feeling that he was not very well content, for I pursued:

"I speak so, Mr. Herbert, because we were such good friends once, and because you are so generous to me about Polly. I cannot help hoping that she will like me in the end. I shall never marry, never—and if Polly will only stay with me—"

"Of course—of course," almost interrupted Mr. Herbert, with an abruptness very strange in him; "but what school am I to send her to in the meanwhile? Where does Mr. de Lusignan mean to reside?"

The question brought me back from dream-land to reality. I knew nothing of my guardian's intentions, and, as he probably had none, it was useless to question him. All my hopes of Polly, and rearing her my own way, and keeping her forever, vanished in a moment. I looked at Mr. Herbert with a blank face as I said:

"I had forgotten; it cannot be. Mr. de Lusignan himself never knows one day where he will be the next. How can you put Polly to school near me, since I do not know where I shall be? Pray don't say any more about it. You mean it so kindly; but the disappointment is almost more than I can bear."

I rose as I spoke. Mr. Herbert seemed to feel the force of my argument, for he uttered not one word against it; indeed, he walked in perfect silence by my side till I reached the road that took me straight to Hanvil House, and there we parted.

"Think of what I said, Mr. Herbert," I urged, as my hand lay in his.

"Thank you, I will," he replied, dropping my hand as if it burned him.

I felt it was rash in me to probe his wound so soon, and I added, rather timidly:

"I speak so, because I cannot bear that you should some day go through the bitter grief I have gone through since yesterday—a grief which I must bear with me to my grave."

"Thank you," he said again; and so, as I said, we parted, he to go back to Polly—happy man!—and I to return to a house where no one, save Elizabeth, cared for my sorrow.

My way lay through the orchard, and as, leaving it, I raised the latch of the little gate that divided it from the garden, I nearly started back at finding myself face to face with my guardian and his daughter-in-law. To see Mr. de Lusignan was nothing, but to see Elizabeth out, dressed to perfection, and, though a little pale, in good health, and, to all appearance, in excellent spirits, was a surprise.

"Why, where have you been?" she asked, gayly; then, perceiving my book—"ah! I see," she added, nodding.

"Bessie is always very good," remarked my guardian.

I ignored this speech, and, looking at Elizabeth, "I suppose you are going to church?" I said.

"No," she answered, rather shortly.

"My dear," observed Mr. de Lusignan, gravely, "why don't you take pattern on Bessie? Why don't you go to church? I could not accompany you, we two not being of the same faith; besides, I never go myself, not being able to keep quiet; but still I should like you to go."

"I only go when I like it," answered Elizabeth, dryly.

"My love, that is not often. Take pattern on Bessie, I say."

This was ill-natured, but it was also intolerant, and sprang from intolerance; for I suppose the godly are not the only ones who cannot endure any way of thinking but their own. I have found that the spirit of persecution is strong in the ungodly, too, and that they can be sharp and bitter with such as do not happen to think like themselves. My guardian was so, at least. The restraint of sitting quietly a in church for half an hour being too much for him, he resented that it should not be so for every one else. I believe, however, that my sad face soon made him repent his ill-nature, for he added, with sudden kindness:

"Never mind me, Bessie; go your way, it is a good one." And, taking out a cigar, he went into the orchard to smoke it alone.

"I wonder if he ever prays?" said Elizabeth, looking after him. "I suppose he does—we all do. Don't think me quite a heathen, Bessie. I cannot help it. I cannot pray at set hours and on set days."

There was no answering this. If Elizabeth did not know that prayer is an act of filial obedience as well as of filial love, no telling of mine would convince her of that truth.

"You seem well again, Elizabeth," I said to her, not knowing what to say.

"Oh! yes," she carelessly answered, "I am well enough. Have you had any breakfast? No! Ah! no wonder, then, that you look so pale. Go in and get something to eat, child."

She spoke kindly, and laid her hand on my shoulder as she spoke; but I felt that Elizabeth did not want my presence. She on whose lap my weary head had rested the evening before, had already vanished, and this was the Elizabeth who, as she kept her own sorrow locked in her own heart, asking none to help her in bearing it, would not be made partaker in strange grief. All that I had raised upon the sand foundation of her fellow-feeling for me died away as she told me to go and take my breakfast. The shears of the fatal sister never cut a thread of life more surely than this bit of advice snapped my frail web of hope asunder.

Elizabeth liked me, but she would have none of me, and she had left her room and come down for the very purpose of shunning me and my sorrow. I submitted—what else could I do?—and walked alone toward the house. As I passed by the Chinese pavilion, I found Miss Russell sitting there in her yellow chair, and for once she was alone.

"Good-morning, Miss Carr," she said, airily, holding out a friendly hand as she spoke.

I answered her greeting soberly enough; and looking in my face with her black eyes, in which beamed sudden softness, she said, kindly:

"Ah! to be suré, you have got your trouble. Well, it is sad. Only, you never thought to see him again, and he was not the one with whom you wished to spend your days, was he?"

"I loved him dearly," I answered, rather uneasy at the turn her consolatory remarks were taking.

"Of course; but if he had put you by for some one else, that would have been hard, Miss Carr. You don't know how hard; for any one can see *you* have not got that danger to fear from some one whom you and I know."

"Oh! pray, Miss Russell," I exclaimed, much alarmed, "don't run away with that idea—pray don't!"

"My dear Miss Carr," she interrupted, "I can't run away, not even with an idea; but I have eyes, and can see."

"But I assure you," I exclaimed, in despair, "that no one cares about me, and that I want no one to care about me."

"Then is Mrs. Henry the person cared for?" she asked, with sudden eagerness. "If so, why don't they marry at once?" she added, fastening her eyes full upon my face.

"I don't know," I faltered, rather bewildered at her point-blank and rapid questions. "I suppose they don't like."

"Perhaps she went to London the other day to get registered," she said, without heeding me. "I should not wonder."

I was very ignorant in those days, and registering, as a social institution, was an utter mystery to me.

"Registered!" I repeated.

"Yes, registered!" impatiently replied Miss Russell. "Formerly a girl was clothed in white, and wreathed and veiled, and led to the altar, and it was generally understood that she was doing a very awful thing, and was no better than a young lamb adorned for a life-long sacrifice. The whole world was called upon to see it, just as the Greeks gathered to see that girl whose name I have forgotten. Now people get registered in an office, and as they do not at all know how long the journey for which they are booking themselves will last, why, they keep quiet about it; because, you see, we have registered marriages and divorce courts—very convenient, very useful, both of them. The old thing was barbarism, but to register couples as one registers luggage is civilization. I wonder they don't number and label them. They ought to, for fear of mistakes. Well, I suppose they do—I suppose they do."

I listened to her amazed; but all Miss Russell saw in my perplexity was the proof of my ignorance. Her face fell a little.

"Perhaps they are not registered, after all," she said. "I don't see why they should be. He need not be afraid of any one, and what need she care for her father-in-law? Of course they are not registered," she added, positively; "and of course he's not the man. Mrs. Henry likes handsome horses, and Mr. Gray's chestnuts are unrivalled. My dear, you need not stare so," she added, with a forced laugh. "There is never any knowing whom, or rather what, a woman marries! I know quite a sweet girl who married a pair of chestnut-colored horses. Well, they were lovely horses, and she married their owner. He was a very presentable young fellow, but if these chestnuts had not turned the scale in his favor, I scarcely think he would have secured the heart of Christabel. The temptation of dashing up to the doors of her friends with these pawing, snorting, and foaming chestnuts was irresistible."

I thought all this talk very wild, and got rather frightened of it, and of Miss Russell. I felt that Mr. Herbert and I were only a pretence for remarks of which the chief interest centred on Mr. Gray and Elizabeth. I wondered how I

could get away from this excitable lady, and for once Miss Dunn, who now appeared, was welcome. Miss Dunn was all amiable condolence.

"I am so sorry, Miss Carr," she said, feelingly. "Of course it is a great trouble to you. Such a fine young man, and so angry with you, I remember. So unjust, too. And the little girl that will not stay with you. It is such a pity! But how she did go on yesterday after you were gone! So jealous of Harry—like a little cat, really. I thought she would have flown at him when he went nigh Mr. Herbert. Do you know, Miss Carr, I think it's a pity you did not try her with sweets. Miss Russell has got such delicious apricot-jam. I dare say a little of it would go a great way with Polly. Or a doll. Shall I get you one? I really think a doll with a little girl would be the very thing."

Miss Dunn had delivered me from Miss Russell, I now wondered who would deliver me from Miss Dunn: Miss Russell kindly did so, by the utterance of one word—

"Don't," she said.

"Don't?" repeated Miss Dunn, raising her fair eyebrows—"don't what, my dear Miss Russell?"

"Don't," repeated Miss Russell, raising her hand, and speaking tartly.

"Don't what?" persisted Miss Dunn, more tartly still.

But Miss Russell had got into an obstinate fit, and was not to be moved out of it.

"Don't," she said, for a third time, and with a shake of her head and a solemn nod, which Burleigh would have envied.

"I am in the way, Miss Dunn," I said quickly; and, without waiting for a reply, I left them both.

As I walked away, I overheard Miss Dunn remarking, in a reproachful tone: "I told you so, you know." To which Miss Russell's only reply was a fourth and triumphant "Don't," as enigmatic to me, and probably to Miss Russell herself, as the three that had preceded it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GRIEF is a hard one to deal with. He gives short credit and takes high interest. He was sharp and exacting with me. I did my best not to bring too sad a face to Miss Russell's table or drawing-room. I complained to none; I avoided giving rise to condolence; I did not attempt to see Elizabeth alone, but Grief was not to be cheated. I had to give him his ducs, and my

poor little exchequer of endurance and fortitude emptied so fast that at the end of two days I broke down. I was not very ill; but I could not sleep, and I scarcely ate. I got feverish, too; and it was agreed that I had a violent cold, and must keep my room. The doctor said so, and I fancied that the little world below was not sorry for it. My guardian liked no one's trouble; and Miss Russell, who had had bitter troubles of her own, had not invited us to have moping visitors. She liked young people, because they are light-hearted; and, though she was sorry for me after a fashion, I could not help thinking that she was vexed with me too for being so dull. As to Elizabeth, she was very kind, and came and sat with me for an hour daily; but she never spoke of James Carr. Comfort came at length, but my comforter, to say the truth, was the one from whom I least expected consolation. I sat one afternoon—the fifth of my confinement—by my open window, and looked down on the garden below. The afternoon was warm and genial, but neither the serenity of the air, nor the beauty of all things, brought any solace to my desolate mood. A darkness spread between me and the face of Nature, and discolored its fairest hues. Life, for a time at least, had lost its loveliness, and looked wan and death-like. Oh! to be at rest—away somewhere—away from this dull pain, and feel no more this worthlessness of God's fairest gift. "No one cares about me," I thought drearily. "Oh! if I only could be dead with poor James!—if I only could!" A little tap at the door broke on this gloomy conclusion. When people want to be dead, they want, as a necessary preliminary, to be quiet, so I am afraid that my "come in" was rather a cross one. The door opened slowly, however, and a little red curly head peeped in at me.

"O Polly!" I cried, in my joy, "is that you?"

"Yes," answered Polly, looking rather surprised at so strange a question, "of course it is."

"Oh, do come in," I said, eagerly.

But Polly's head vanished immediately on this invitation, the door even seemed inclined to close, but for a moment only, and Polly appeared again, propelled, or at least encouraged, I could not help thinking, by some invisible good genius behind.

"Oh, do come in," I entreated, in my most coaxing tones, but not daring to rise from my chair lest I should frighten her away; and then, mindful of Miss Dunn's advice, I exclaimed, with sudden cleverness, "I have got such delicious jam!"

Polly, however, on hearing of jam, became mistrustful, and looked behind her, as if inclined for flight. But the same good genius again came to the rescue, for after a brief parley Polly came in, and the door closed behind her. Her greeting was not encouraging.

"Jane is to fetch me at four o'clock," said Polly, looking me full in the face.

"Very well," I replied, taking out my watch. "It is only three, so sit down here by me, Polly, and let us be friends."

"I don't like jam," declared Polly, without sitting down.

I was delighted to hear it; for, suppose that Miss Russell had objected to my disposing of her jam, what should I have done?

"Never mind the jam," I said, encouragingly; "but come here by me, and let us talk—let me see—let us talk of a doll."

Polly, nothing loath now, came forward and took a chair by mine. Was there ever such a doll as that which Polly and I now discussed? For she was to have black eyes and yellow hair, and a green robe looped up with brown velvet (Polly's choice), and the tallest of tall gray boots with tassels to them, and the tiniest of hats with the most drooping of feathers, and, to crown all, a parasol.

"And now," said I, thinking the subject exhausted, "let us talk of something else."

"Don't you think it is four o'clock?" said Polly, by way of a subject.

"Not yet, Polly. Talk to me about James, Polly dear."

Polly stared at me and was mute; but her brown eyes seemed to grow larger, and her little lips began to quiver. I hastened to exclaim:

"What color must the parasol be?"

"Blue," answered Polly, with a promptness that did credit to the decision of her character.

Blue, with a green dress! O Polly, Polly!

"Blue," I said, aloud—"very well. And now, tell me something."

"Georgy has got loads of books," said Polly.

"You mean Mr. Herbert, Polly."

"Yes, but his name *is* Georgy," persisted Polly.

"Then tell him I shall be glad of some books, Polly. Not yet," I added, as Polly jumped up to deliver the message forthwith. "First tell me something else."

Polly pondered awhile, then came out with—

"He's so very angry with you, you know."

I confess I was amazed.

"O Polly!" I exclaimed, "that cannot be! Angry with me!—about what?"

"I don't know," answered Polly, with cool indifference. "He was angry on Sunday, you know—so!" and Polly frowned and bit her lip, and looked very cross; then she added in a breath: "Don't you think it is four o'clock?"

"But what could he be angry for?" I cried, warmly, without heeding her. "Do you know, Polly?"

Polly raised her eyes to the ceiling, looked at a fly, then came out with—

"S'pose you ask him? Don't you think it is four o'clock?" she added.

Polly was so evidently tired of my company, that all wish to keep her left me. The information she had given me concerning Mr. Herbert's inexplicable anger had also wholly banished that longing for the grave which I had felt an hour before. I was too much vexed to wish to be dead, and, indeed, had only one thought—to find out the motive of Mr. Herbert's wrath. Remembering how he had looked when I spoke of Elizabeth, I began to fear that I had been more zealous than discreet, and I longed to apologize for and explain my interference. I went down-stairs at once, on the chance of finding him below, but the drawing-room was tenanted by no one save Elizabeth, who put down her book in much surprise as she saw Polly and me entering hand-in-hand.

"What, alive again!" she exclaimed, gayly; "truly, Polly works wonders!"

But Polly, indifferent to praise, was all anxiety to be gone; and, as she had seen Jane in the hall, lost no time in bidding me adieu.

"When am I to get her?" were her parting words.

"Her' means the doll, I suppose, Polly. I really don't know when she will come—suppose you come and see me after to-morrow?"

"I shall bring Ellinor," said Polly, promptly. I acquiesced, and thus we parted.

Elizabeth looked after her, and shook her head.

"And so that little monkey has so restored you that you do not seem the same," she said. "Mysterious! She is red-haired, a little selfish pig, who only cares for her doll, and does not care a pin for you. How did she do it, Bessie?"

"I don't know, Elizabeth. When did you see Mr. Herbert?"

"He called yesterday—to ask how you were, I believe."

I shook my head.

"No, Elizabeth, he did not call for that; for it seems that Mr. Herbert is quite angry with me—Polly says so."

"Does she?" exclaimed Elizabeth, raising her eyebrows.

"She does, indeed."

I had sat down on a chair by the door, and looked very disconsolate, I suppose, for Elizabeth laughed at me outright.

"Poor little simple dove!" she said, tossing up her book and catching it again, "what need you care if he is angry or not? I never care when people are angry with me."

A dove is a lovely bird, but it is not always pleasant to be called one; I was very much nettled at the appellation, as thus bestowed upon me by Elizabeth.

"But I care," I replied, with some asperity. "What right has Mr. Herbert to be angry with me?"

"None, I fancy."

"I know why he is angry," I resumed; "it can only be about you. O Elizabeth, do tell me this: has Mr. Herbert any chance?"

"You want to make a peace-offering of me," she answered, merrily; "thank you, Bessie, but I cannot enlighten you. I really do not know what Mr. Herbert's chance is."

She spoke so good-humoredly that I could not help thinking Mr. Herbert was getting back into favor.

"Don't let your eyes sparkle, Bessie," she said, quickly, "I mean nothing of the kind."

"Yes, you do," I replied, eagerly, "only—"

I had no time to proceed; the folding-window opened, and Miss Russell was wheeled in from the garden, where she had been taking the air, attended by Miss Dunn, and followed by Mr. Herbert and Mr. Gray.

"We have found the very spot," cried Miss Russell, who looked in high glee—"but, goodness gracious! is that Miss Carr?—My dear Miss Carr, I am so glad to see you well again! Not that you look very well yet," she added, frankly, "*mais cela viendra*, as the French say."

Mr. Gray, who, in a quiet way, was the most courteous of men, added his congratulations to Miss Russell's, and at the same time examined me critically, as if to ascertain how far my brief illness had detracted from my value as a picture. Miss Dunn lamented kindly to see me still so pale, and Mr. Herbert looked at me with such gravity, merely acknowledging my presence with a silent bow, that I remembered his anger as reported by Polly, and felt much displeasure rising within me at the thought.

"I am so much obliged to you for sending me Polly," I said, addressing him in my coldest tones.

He brightened suddenly, and answered, with a smile:

"I hope Polly behaved well?"

"Oh, so well!" I replied, avoiding to cast a glance in his direction, and looking steadily before me.

My eyes then fell on a tall mirror, and I had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Herbert in it, standing like one amazed. I had not accustomed him to these grand ways, and they took him by surprise, I dare say.

"Yes, we have found the very spot," resumed Miss Russell, still in high glee; "for you must know, Miss Carr," she added, addressing me, "that I am going to have a fern-show. Will you compete? Mr. Gray has already dubbed Mrs. Henry de Lusignan 'Queen of the Ferns,' so she is sure to carry off all the prizes."

These last words were uttered with considerable asperity. The presence of the man whom she had loved always acted strangely on Miss Russell. She could not forget that this handsome tranquil gentleman of fifty had been the load-star of her youth. She was irritable if he looked at another woman; and sarcastic when he paid the slightest attention to herself. No present kindness could atone for past neglect; love was dead, but jealousy was keen and living still. "Queen of the Ferns," repeated Elizabeth, in her most careless tone—"very pretty; but if I send in any thing, Miss Russell, it shall be parsley. I think it quite as pretty as any fern, and a great deal more useful."

On hearing this matter-of-fact remark, uttered by the rosiest and most poetic of lips, Mr. Gray did a rare thing for him—he laughed outright; and Miss Russell giggled hysterically, and looked exasperated. I was standing near one of the folding windows, and caught a glimpse of Harry and Watkins playing on the terrace without, and availed myself of the excuse to slip out and join them. I thus exchanged one storm for another, for scarcely had I reached Harry, when he burst out into a fit of crying about his ball, which he had just lost. While Watkins went to seek for it, I stooped on the terrace, and, putting my arms round the boy, did my best to coax him into a better humor.

"She did it o' purpose!" gasped Harry, between two sobs—"she did!"

"Did what?" asked Mr. Herbert, who had come out after me. "Your ball, is it? Why, look, here it is," and, picking it up from a corner where it had rolled unseen, he threw it deliberately on the very centre of a large grass-plot in front of the house. "There, go and look for it now."

he added, in a quick, imperative way, which was always successful with children.

Harry obeyed, without thinking of demur; and while through the folding window which had remained ajar I heard Miss Russell's voice high and sharp within, and Elizabeth's light and pleasant, Mr. Herbert, turning to me, said in a grave, low tone:

"You are displeased with me, Miss Carr—may I ask what I have done?"

I felt the blood rushing up to my face; but I scorned to deny.

"Polly tells me that you are angry with me, Mr. Herbert," I said at once; "and angry since last Sunday. I do not ask if it be true, but I simply say this: You know that what I said was well meant—you may disregard it, but I deny your right to any such feeling as anger with regard to me."

Mr. Herbert looked petrified, but he did not attempt to contradict Polly's declaration. He stood before me silent, and utterly confused; his face was scarlet, and for once his blue eyes had not a frank look. He seemed so thoroughly disconcerted that I wondered if my vexation at being called a dove by Elizabeth had not carried me too far, and rushing into the opposite extreme, with my usual want of discretion, I exclaimed, in a fit of tardy penitence:

"I wish I had held my tongue; but I could not help it. Indeed, I have not deserved that you should be angry with me. I have always done my best to serve you, and I will do so still," I added, warmly—"indeed I will. And, Mr. Herbert," I continued, lowering my voice confidentially, "do not mind Mr. Gray—I do not think he has a bit of a chance."

I looked at him triumphantly as I said this, but, instead of the joy and gratitude which I expected, Mr. Herbert heard me out with downcast eyes and bent brow, and a slight gnawing of his nether lip, which boded no good. At length he looked up, and said with a forced laugh:

"Polly is a little chatterbox, Miss Carr—pray never mind a word she says."

"Then you were not angry on Sunday!" I exclaimed.

In a moment his face was in a flame again. He could not deny, and he would not confess; but he was spared the trouble of doing either by the sudden appearance of Miss Dunn on the threshold of the folding window.

"I am so sorry to interrupt you," she said, sweetly; "but you are both wanted within—the fern-show, you know."

Thus summoned, we both obeyed; but never

had ferns less interest for me than then. What could ail Mr. Herbert that he was so strange and altered? While I was racking my brain to find this out, the fern-show was going through the process of all shows, and was being discussed after the most approved fashion. At first I did not deign to pay the least attention to what was going on around me. I was getting angry with Mr. Herbert again, and to get angry with any one is a very engrossing sort of occupation; but when Miss Russell said: "We must have a tent, you know;" when Elizabeth remarked, "We cannot do without a band;" and when Miss Dunn added, in her dulcet tones, "Don't you think, dear Miss Russell, that we shall also require a tent for the refreshments?" I pricked up my ears, and entered into the fern debate with all the zeal and vigor of a young M. P. on his first sitting. I do not remember what I said, nor was it worth remembering, I dare say, but I know that Elizabeth looked amused, and Miss Russell a little impatient—that Miss Dunn nodded her approbation of every suggestion I made, that Mr. Gray watched me curiously, and that Mr. Herbert said not one word, good or bad, unless when spoken to, but sat with so unusual an expression of gravity on his handsome face, that, when both he and Mr. Gray were gone, Miss Russell exclaimed:

"I really think Mr. Herbert is getting disagreeable."

"Do you?" echoed Miss Dunn; and, turning to me, "What do you think, Miss Carr?"

"I think that the fern-show will be a delightful affair," I replied.

We all enjoyed the fern-show save Mr. de Lusignan, who, when he came home to dinner, heard of it with the most freezing indifference; indeed, he sat in his chair the whole evening, with a face of such settled gloom that it struck me, especially as Elizabeth was gay as a lark, and made herself merry in a way that was not habitual to her. Every evening Harry was brought in by Watkins to bid his grandfather good-night. This evening the girl brought him in as usual. The boy ran up to Mr. de Lusignan's chair, and looked up in his face, asking, rather imperatively, what he had brought him from "Lunnon."

"What I have brought you from London, Harry?" said Mr. de Lusignan, slowly; "why, nothing, for the excellent reason that I was not in London to-day."

"Go to-morrow," suggested Harry, with a wistful frown.

Mr. de Lusignan did not answer. He looked down moodily in the child's face, and pushed

back the hair from his forehead, as if to see him better still.

"Go to-morrow," persisted Harry.

"God bless you, my boy!" said Mr. de Lusignan, in a low, gentle voice, which struck us all.

"Go to-morrow," said Harry again; but Watkins, obeying a sign of my guardian's, took him away.

The child, indeed, looked back as he was being led to the door; but Mr. de Lusignan's eyes remained fixed on the carpet, and his arms folded across his breast.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THIS fern-show, as I learned later, was Elizabeth's doing. She liked excitement under any aspect, and a crowd of people, of whom she knew nothing, and about whom she cared naught, was the very thing for her. For ferns, in themselves, she felt supreme indifference, and, on the morning of the show, again informed me that she could not see the superiority of *Trichomanes speciosum* over parsley.

I know that, being still very unhappy, I ought to have derived no sort of pleasure from a show of any kind; but we are never young in vain, and, I cannot deny it, the show, Polly, who came to see me with Ellinor, and Polly's doll, the getting of which proved as great an undertaking, in its way, as the Golden Fleece in the days of the Argonauts—all these, I say, distracted me most effectually, but the show most of all. Saturday was the day appointed, and Friday was dull and gloomy. Great was my joy, therefore, when I woke and saw the sun shining in through my window-blind. I dressed hastily, and ran down to the end of the garden where the tent was to be erected. It was already pitched, and stood there before me, the loveliest tent for which ferns ever exchanged forest-shade or open sky. It was dazzling white, striped with red; it had red poles and red flags, that fluttered defiantly in the morning sun; and, when I saw Miss Russell's yellow chair wheeled toward the spot, with Miss Dunn in attendance, and Elizabeth following slowly, I ran to meet them in great glee.

"O Miss Russell!" I cried, in my delight, "how pretty! I do not think there ever was so pretty a tent, do you?"

"I remember one ten times prettier than this twenty years ago," said Miss Russell, with a sigh.

"Prettier! Was it striped with red, Miss Russell?"

"Hope had striped it with every color of the rainbow," answered Miss Russell, sadly. "Please not to go in," she added, with a little scream, as Elizabeth waked up to the tent, and attempted to enter. "No one is to enter that tent until the show begins."

Elizabeth looked round from the threshold of the tent with the uplifted drapery in her hand, and smiled haughtily at Miss Russell's imperative tone.

"Why, I can see nothing within your tent, save a few weeds in flower-pots," she said, rather disdainfully, but she dropped the cloth which she had raised.

"They are my ferns, I suppose," sharply replied Miss Russell. "I know Mr. Gray has sent for his ferns to London, so no wonder if he gets a prize. My ferns are all genuine, and so I expect nothing of the kind."

"Are Mr. Gray's ferns sham ones, then?" inquired Elizabeth, innocently.

"Please not to ask me about ferns," answered Miss Russell, with great asperity. "Mr. Gray has proclaimed you Queen of the Ferns, so, surely, you know all about them."

Elizabeth laughed gayly, but did not take up the glove. Miss Dunn kindly put in:

"So like Mr. Gray! He always does say these nice things. Queen of the Ferns! How very pretty!" And she laughed, and seemed much amused.

Elizabeth's blue eyes had a flash in which there was as much surprise as anger at Miss Dunn's audacity. I saw that the three ladies were fast drifting into a quarrel, and, as I caught in the distance a glimpse of the refreshment-tent—striped white and blue—I quietly slipped away, and walked toward it, slowly at first, more quickly as I got out of sight. But there was nothing to see in this blue tent. It stood in a green nook, within the shadow of tall trees, and had not even the flower-pots with weeds, as Elizabeth disdainfully called them, of which Miss Russell was so jealous. I looked in unforbidden, and, after allowing my imagination to revel on the delicacies which were to be spread there a few hours later, I walked back to that prohibited sanctuary, the fern-tent. Oh, joy of joys! it was unguarded—the ladies were gone. Quick as thought, I darted in, and found myself face to face with Mr. Herbert.

I had not exchanged ten words with him since the day on which I had taxed him with being angry with me, and he had not attempted to deny

the accusation. He had been remarkably cool with me since then, and he now looked so little pleased at my intrusion that tears of mortification rushed to my eyes.

"Mr. Herbert," I exclaimed, impetuously, "you do not know your friends. Indeed, you do not. I do, and have always done my best to serve you, and yet you will be angry with me. I know why," I added, with more frankness than discretion. "It is all on account of Mr. Gray."

"For Heaven's sake do not say that," he cried, with something like passion—"do not!"

"But I do not think he has a chance," I exclaimed, eager to comfort him; "indeed, I do not, Mr. Herbert."

He looked at me very earnestly; then, in a most sober tone, he said: "Will you give Mrs. Henry de Lusignan a message from me, Miss Carr?"

"Oh! gladly," I said, with an eagerness to serve him which he acknowledged with a rather cold "Thank you." "What am I to do?" I pursued.

"Simply to tell her this, that I have something to say to her, which I cannot write, and that I entreat her to give me the opportunity of exchanging a few words with her in private *to-day*—not to-morrow—to-day."

His look was so grave, his tone so serious, that I looked at him in mingled doubt and surprise.

"Will you do that?" he asked.

"Certainly," I answered. "But is that all?"

"All on that subject. And now," he added, with a complete change of look and manner, "do advise me about these ferns. I am no exhibitor, and therefore have been appointed by Miss Russell to assign them their respective places. You are no exhibitor, and can surely assist me in this important matter."

"I am afraid Miss Russell would object to me," I replied, not liking to yield at once to temptation.

"Let her object," he answered, with a smile. "Besides, why need she know it?"

Sin enhanced by mystery is irresistible. Besides, Mr. Herbert and I were standing in the centre of a circle of the loveliest ferns—oh! profane Elizabeth, how could you call them weeds?—and I forgot that, if I did not appear at the breakfast-table, discovery was all but certain. With deplorable facility I yielded to this delightful temptation, and was soon deep in my subject. How we revelled in it, Mr. Herbert and I!—and how we both agreed in preferring common ferns—ferns which we had seen together in the cool

shades of Fontainebleau—to the rarest specimen of modern fernery. Especially did we exalt our old friend, Lady Fern—ay, even above *Trichomanes speciosum* itself, though reared in the gap of Dunloe, and found only in Southern Africa, or the most secret recesses of the lakes of Killarney.

"Lady Fern!" said Mr. Herbert—"the name alone is charming. And Lady Fern shall be queen whenever I sit on the jury."

The word "queen" recalled "Queen of the Ferns" and Elizabeth, and a matchless opportunity slipping out of my hands unawares, with a start I cried:

"Oh! what a pity! This was the very time for you to speak to Elizabeth. Oh! why did I stay here instead of fetching her?"

"She would not have come," he said, quickly. "Do not go—it is useless—she will not come."

"But I can try," I persisted, turning away. "How vexatious not to have thought of it before!"

"And how vexatious that you will not believe me!" he exclaimed, looking annoyed. "I assure you that Elizabeth will not come."

He seemed so hurt that I paused on the threshold of the tent, and looked round at him in doubt and surprise. His brow was flushed, and, though he tried to smile, he was biting his lip in evident vexation. Had Mr. Herbert got a temper, after all? I was more surprised than I can tell. I was also a little hurt.

"But, Mr. Herbert," I argued, "I only want to serve you."

"I beg your pardon," he said, stiffly.

I bowed, and went away, leaving him to his evident displeasure. "How disagreeable love makes some people!" I thought, as I walked toward the house—"there am I depriving myself of the pleasure of looking at these lovely ferns, in order to oblige Mr. Herbert, and see how he thanks me! He is getting very ill-tempered, that I can tell him."

But if Mr. Herbert was disagreeable, his lady-love, on hearing his message, which I delivered at once, to my great joy, having overtaken her just as she was going in to breakfast, frowned, and looked so distant and haughty that I drew back in some alarm.

"Really, Bessie," she said, "what can you mean by being so absurd?—that I should go and look for Mr. Herbert in the tent—"

"That was my suggestion not his," I interrupted, much abashed—"all he wants is to speak to you, to-day, Elizabeth."

"Then let him if he can," she replied, disdainfully. "I have got nothing to say to Mr. Her-

bert, and do not care if the whole world heard what he may have to say to me."

With this she entered the house, leaving me dumfounded, and so much mortified that I was not tempted to go back and give Mr. Herbert an account of my embassy.

The fern-show would not have been a real fern-show, if there had not been a jury and prizes. Miss Russell's eagerness on this subject the whole morning amazed me. It was—"I ought to get a prize, you know;" or, "I must get a prize;" or, "Of course I shall not get a prize. I am quite prepared for it, as mistress of the house. But it is not fair."

Although Miss Russell was prepared for defeat, her ardor for victory was none the less keen. She had herself wheeled about the tent until the hour of the opening, as if she could hope to pierce the canvas and get at her fate, hidden within; and when Mr. Herbert and the other members of the jury left the tent, there was no coaxing Miss Russell did not employ to get at the truth from them. Mr. Herbert was impenetrable; and while he was gayly parrying her attacks, the other members of the jury quietly stole away.

"I see what it is," exclaimed Miss Russell, with considerable asperity, "I have got no prize!" And in her vexation she added sharply, "Wheel me out of the sun, Brown, will you!"

"How much Miss Russell wishes for a prize!" I said to Mr. de Lusignan, by whom I was standing.

He laughed at my simplicity.

"It is all gambling," he said, "all gambling, Mignonne; for if ever there was a gambler, Miss Russell is one."

I opened my eyes wide.

"Oh! but with whom can she gamble?" I exclaimed.

"With the world at large, Bessie. She has partners in London, in Paris, in St. Petersburg, etc., and they are called consols, or three per cents., or five per cents., etc., or shares, or debenture stocks, or all sorts of barbarous things, about which you know nothing. Have you been so long in Miss Russell's house, and have you not noticed that she is elated or depressed in the morning after post-time, and only gets to be herself in the afternoon? Just now a fern-prize does as well as colonial or foreign mines, or telegraph companies, for excitement."

I do not know what more my guardian would have added, if Miss Russell had not now been wheeled back to the tent, spite of the sun.

"I am sure it is two o'clock," she said, "and,

as the show begins at two, I really will go in before the crowd comes."

"It wants a quarter to two," said Mr. de Lusignan, taking out his watch.

"Your watch is slow," impatiently retorted Miss Russell.—"Wheel me in, Brown."

The yellow chair was wheeled into the tent. We followed it, and a scream of delight announced Miss Russell's victory.

"You know, Miss Carr, that I have got a prize!" she exclaimed, looking round at me. "My lady fern has won the day!" And without waiting for my reply, or giving a look to any ferns save her own, she added eagerly, "Wheel me out, Brown; I see Mrs. Thomas Gray coming."

She was wheeled out at once, and I heard her exulting exclamation of, "I have got a prize, Mrs. Thomas Gray. My lady fern has been proclaimed queen."

"In-deed!" was the slow reply, and Mrs. Thomas Gray entered the tent, escorted by her handsome brother-in-law.

"Very lovely—so delicate," murmured Mr. Gray, as he sauntered round the tent with his critical look, and before he could see me I slipped out.

Polly was to be brought to me at two exactly, and I wanted Polly. I found her in the house, just coming in, and Polly's first words were:

"Where's the doll?"

"Not come yet, Polly. And where's Ellinor?"

"Ellinor's ill. But why didn't the doll come?"

"I suppose her parasol was not ready. But what is the matter with Ellinor?"

I wanted to talk of Ellinor, as a most convenient diversion; but friendship was weak in Polly's tender breast, and she wanted to talk of the doll. I took her to the fern-tent; then to the refreshment-tent, where I stuffed her; then to listen to the band, but all in vain.

Life has told me many a time since those days that the better half of our joys lies in their anticipation. This fern-show proved no exception to the rule, so far as I was concerned. The ferns looked lovely in their tent, the refreshments were both choice and abundant, and the band, rare good fortune, as I learned later, was a first-rate band. But somehow or other I did not enjoy myself very much; all through Polly, who worried me so incessantly about her doll that I once caught myself wishing Polly had remained in Australia. I have always been shy of crowds, and this crowd seemed to me a very motley one

I scarcely knew a face in it, and I am bound to say that the faces I did see did not tempt me into a wish for close acquaintanceship.

There was a Miss Raymond, whom I had never seen before, and whom I have never seen since, but whom I met incessantly during the fern-show. I know that she was called Miss Raymond, because I was introduced to her by Miss Dunn, and honored by her with a most supercilious stare during the ceremony. I have no doubt that she took me for Polly's governess, and was amazed at Miss Dunn's impertinence. I met her first in the fern-tent, and she there made an indelible impression upon me. This young lady, who was even more than usually girlish in appearance—that is to say, who had very light curly hair, very light eyes and eyebrows, very slight features, scarcely any shoulders, and no waist to speak of, and who, to enhance the effect of those youthful attributes, was attired in the most ethereal of garments, duly puffed out and looped up, with the daintiest of little straw hats perched on the top of her little, empty, curly head—this young lady, I say, made up for the stinginess with which Dame Nature had dealt out to her the gifts of strength, bodily or mental, by the exercise of unlimited authority over her maternal parent. She called her “darling,” indeed, which was very kind of her, but I can aver that poor “darling,” a strong, raw-boned, red-haired woman, was ruled with a rod of iron.

“Now, darling,” playfully remarked, Miss Raymond, “*are you coming?*”

“But, my dear, I should like to look at these ferns,” remonstrated darling.

“Now where’s the use of looking at ferns?” severely retorted her daughter.

“But, my dear, we came to look at ferns,” argued the mother

“Now, darling, I wish you would not go on so,” sharply said Miss Raymond, evidently losing patience at this persistent rebellion; “besides, you know, you have seen them.”

This last remark sounded, no doubt, like a relaxation of authority, for “darling,” brightening up, exclaimed with great alacrity:

“Indeed, my dear, I have not seen half of them yet.”

“Plenty!—plenty!” impatiently said her daughter; “besides, you know, I can’t bear being called ‘my dear’—so school-girl—and you *will* do it!”

Darling bowed her red head under the reproof.

“I can’t help it, my dear,” she said, meekly.

“I used to call you so when you were a little thing, and—”

“Oh! if you *will*, why, you will!” exclaimed Miss Raymond, with a little sniff of indignation. “I know of old that, when you are bent upon a thing, you *will* do it.”

Having uttered this speech, Miss Raymond walked out of the tent, and poor “darling,” looking rather frightened, followed her.

I am bound to say that Miss Raymond was not always so cross as she showed herself then, and that this display of temper proceeded partly from the natural exasperation produced on her powerful mind by seeing another young lady with garments more puffed out and skirts more looped up, and a much smaller hat than her own, engaged in a close and apparently most interesting conversation with the intellectual young man who had once given me the story of Joseph’s dog.

When, half an hour later, I saw Miss Raymond again in the blue-and-white tent, partaking of refreshments, she was doing so in company with that identical young gentleman, and looked in the highest of spirits and the most charming of tempers; and “darling,” unwatched and unproved, was drinking endless cups of tea in a remote corner.

My head ached with the sun and with Polly, so to get shade, at least, I wandered away to the little lake. No one had found it out yet, and the spot was as green and cool as if it had been buried in a wilderness miles away from the world.

“Now, is not this delightful, Polly?” I said, sitting down on the grass in the shade.

“No,” replied Polly, who was very sulky.

But I was getting hard-hearted, and I let Polly sulk away. I looked at the tall reeds which rose from the glassy surface of the lake, at a little islet in one of its bays, that seemed to rest there as if it had come a long journey and was tired; at the water-lilies, so large, so white, so calm on those still waters, and every thing spoke to me of freshness and rest in the soothing language of inanimate things.

We had not been long there before I heard Elizabeth’s clear voice across the lake, through the trees. Presently I saw her coming out of the green gloom, attended by Mr. Gray on one side, and Mr. Herbert on the other. She was radiantly beautiful, she was also warm, and fanned herself slowly. She saw me at once, and gave me a pleasant nod; then, in the tone of a queen to her subjects, she said:

“I am tired.”

In a moment Mr. Gray spied out a rustic seat in the shade, and Elizabeth sat down upon it with a languid air. Mr. Gray sat down by her, but Mr. Herbert remained standing. He leaned his

back against the trunk of a tree. I fancied it was to have a better look of her lovely face.

"Do you still paint, Mr. Herbert?" she asked, suddenly; and, without waiting for his reply, "I put the question because you look as if you were studying a subject for a picture."

"You are quite right," he answered, bowing his head with a smile—"a beautiful subject."

Elizabeth looked as unconscious as if the lake were the only beautiful thing within his ken, but Mr. Gray smiled. I do not think he was of a jealous temper at all. I do not think that, if Elizabeth had been his wife, he would have objected to the whole world falling in love with her.

"I thought Mr. Herbert's forte was landscape-painting," he remarked.

"My forte was nothing," rather dryly observed Mr. Herbert; "but when I did draw, I could draw heads, of course."

"What a charming little sketch that was you made of Miss Carr!" said Elizabeth—"so poetical, and yet so life-like!"

The air was very still, and the lake was narrow. I could hear every word they said, I could also see how Mr. Gray's calm eyes fell upon me, as if he wondered that my image could be made poetic, and yet life-like. Mr. Herbert said nothing. Elizabeth continued:

"That was a pleasant time in Fontainebleau, Mr. Herbert."

I saw, or fancied that I saw, the color deepen on his cheek. I could imagine the light which came to his eyes as she thus recalled the past. His voice sank as he said:

"It was more than pleasant."

Mr. Gray was not a jealous man, but he was nervous and irritable.

"I detest Fontainebleau," he said, with his most fastidious look. "An endless palace, an endless forest, endless rocks, endless every thing!"

"I adored Fontainebleau!" perversely retorted Elizabeth. "I thought it the most delicious place I was ever in. I liked the palace, the forest, the rocks—every thing!"

She looked saucily at Mr. Gray, who took this rebuff in submissive silence. I suppose that to see his rival thus slighted gave Mr. Herbert heart, for he said, with a sudden and happy laugh:

"Do you remember Barbison and Ganne's, and his room full of painting?"

"Hideous daubs!" ejaculated Mr. Gray, evidently getting ill-tempered.

I suppose Elizabeth thought she had been long enough gracious to her early lover, and that she must hold the balance more even between him and the second, for she said, carelessly:

"I don't remember these paintings enough to speak of them."

"Not remember them!" exclaimed Mr. Herbert, in genuine surprise.

"No. Don't you know that I forget places and things when they are out of my sight?" she replied, rising. "I can't help it," she added, addressing Mr. Gray, and looking full in his face, "my interest in those I like best goes when I don't see them."

He laughed, and seemed much amused at her frankness.

"I thought you said you adored Fontainebleau?"

"Of course I did," she replied, opening her blue eyes, "and so I did adore it then, but you don't suppose I adore it *now*. Why, I should not care if I never saw it again."

"Then I suppose that to keep your regard one must never be out of your sight?" he said, with some gravity.

"Oh! but that would be so tiresome," she objected, gayly.

"For you, granted; but think of the temptation you hold out."

I heard no more, for they had reëntered the little grove. Mr. Herbert came round to me.

"They say that women are fickle, Bessie," he said. "Strange error! Such as Elizabeth was the first day I knew her, such she is still!"

I had risen and stood by him, holding little Polly by the hand. I thought he was going to stay with us. But if woman be unchangeable, man is not more mutable. The spell which abided in her flowing garments was no more to be resisted at Hanvil House than at Fontainebleau. He stood still a while looking after her; then, saying something which I did not hear, he left me abruptly, and followed in the track of his divinity. The lake had lost its charm, and I left it, dragged back by Polly to the bewitching precincts of the refreshment-tent.

Mr. Herbert's star had risen once more when I saw the three again an hour later. Mr. Gray bore his eclipse very calmly. If he was no longer favored with Elizabeth's smiles, he could still look at her.

At five the fern-show closed, the band ceased to play, the refreshment-tent was fairly cleared out, and the guests trooped off, all looking as if they had had quite enough of it. Miss Russell, who sat in her yellow chair, attended by Brown only, on the threshold of the Chinese pavilion, looked after her visitors as they departed with a critical eye. Ladies in amazing costumes predominated, but black coats were scarce, and there

was only a sprinkling of brown gardeners, with their wives and daughters.

"The fern-show would not have been a genuine sort of thing without them, my dear," confidentially said Miss Russell aside to me. "They were very pleased to be asked, poor souls! And, *entre nous*, Miss Carr, they did not eat half as much of the cakes and other things as the young ladies. How *they* did tuck in, to be sure!"

Miss Russell's asides had this in common with stage ones, that they could be heard afar. I was ready to sink with shame at being thus addressed in a loud and clear tone, especially as Miss Raymond was just then passing by, escorted by the narrator of the never-to-be-forgotten story of Joseph's dog. The broadest of stares was Miss Raymond's only answer to Miss Russell's kind remark upon the appetite of young ladies; and, having ignored the lady of the house as much as one mortal creature can ignore another, she passed on.

Luckily for me, "darling" thought proper to come up to Miss Russell and express her delight at all she had seen and admired; and as the good lady was of an eloquent temper, and did not always know how to finish a sentence, but was apt to flounder inextricably in the very midst of it, I could slip away, and quit the dangerous vicinity of Miss Russell. I had not walked ten steps before I met my guardian. He had been very moody all day, and now looked so gloomy that I could not help feeling uneasy as I watched him. He saw me very well, but walked on without opening his lips. I stood still, in order to avoid meeting him again; and while I stood thus Mr. Herbert came up to me. I was struck at once with the gravity of his aspect.

"Polly is gone," I said. "Jane came for her half an hour ago. Polly is very cross with me, all about her doll, but I really cannot help it."

Mr. Herbert did not answer one word I said, but still looked at me with the same settled gravity.

"You gave her my message?" he said.

"You mean Elizabeth? Yes, I told her at once."

"That is why she has avoided being alone with me the whole day. It is hard to see so noble and beautiful a creature bent on her own undoing."

My heart sank at his words.

"Oh, do not go!" I cried; "I will speak to her again—do not go!"

I was turning away—his upraised hand arrested me.

"Do not," he said; "tell her nothing—it is

too late. I will be honest—it was too late even this morning. I suspected it; I am sure of it now, that I have seen her with Mr. Gray. Yes, it is too late forever. What I can do I will do, but who can undo what she has been doing all day? I repeat it—it is too late forever. Good-by—God bless you!"

He took my hand and pressed it, and left me, rooted to the spot in mingled amazement and dismay. A smart tap on my shoulder soon roused me. I looked round, and saw Elizabeth blooming and gay.

"I am afraid my fan is a hard one," she said; "but you looked as motionless as Lot's wife. Pray let me hear all the particulars."

"Particulars of what, Elizabeth?" I asked, slowly.

"Of Mr. Herbert's invitation to luncheon, of course. What, do you mean to say that you know nothing about it? Impossible."

"Indeed, Elizabeth, Mr. Herbert never opened his lips about it to me."

She looked at me in evident doubt.

"It must be true, since you say it," she remarked at length. "And so I give you news instead of receiving any. We are all to go and take luncheon at Mr. Herbert's after to-morrow, and Mrs. Thomas Gray is to do the honors; and it will be odd, will it not, to see Mr. Gray a guest in his own house?"

I answered that it would be odd, but nothing seemed so odd to me as to see Elizabeth so light and gay, and to feel a weight so heavy at my heart for her sake. But little by little that weight passed away. Mr. Herbert was jealous, that was plain, and a jealous man can commit strange mistakes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THERE are times when our days drop off one by one, slowly and leisurely, eventless and colorless, and of these a woman's life chiefly consists. But there are times, too, when days are so full, so strange, and so dramatic, that they comprise the story of years; and of a few such days my life was made up about this time. When I look back upon it now, I am amazed to see that so much of moment to myself and to others occurred in so brief a space.

I had greatly wished to see Gray's House, and yet, on the morning of our intended visit to it, I woke with the heaviest feeling of sorrow I had felt for many a day. It seemed to me as if all the grief I had curbed down since I had learned

the death of James Carr were coming back in its early force. I felt too restless to sleep again, and, after a while, I thought I would go down to the garden. I dressed hastily, stole down-stairs through the silent house, and let myself out with a sense of relief. The morning was beautiful and calm, the flowers were still bathed in dew, the birds were only beginning to chirrup—every thing was fresh and lovely as I passed through the solitary gravel paths. I went on without stopping till I had reached the little lake. I had a fancy for seeing it at that early hour. It was fully gratified. The red sun was climbing above the glassy pool, half veiled by thick mists which floated softly on its surface. A forest of reeds rose straight and tall in the morning stillness. Lilies lay floating on the water, above which the wild-fowl screamed loud and shrill in their wheeling flight. They had just wakened from their night-slumbers, I believe, and looked like so many winged ghosts as I saw them through the white mist. I stood and looked at them, wondering what I should say about them if I were a poet, but always coming back with a sort of despair to the matter-of-fact conclusion that I should have nothing to say except that they were birds. The truth is, poets can indulge in few flights of fancy now. They were more favored by their surroundings in the olden time. If Shakespeare had not been a contemporary of the fairies, and caught many a glimpse of them in their green haunts, he could never have told us all sorts of things about them; and, as for the Greeks and the Romans, who can doubt that when they went out in the early morning, as the full moon sank behind the hill, and gray dawn was breaking in the sky, they actually met their heathen gods and goddesses trooping home to Olympus? If I had been one of these, I dare say I should have met my favorite Diana just then. It would have been worth while seeing the divine huntress, fleet and fair, brushing the morning dew from the grass with her sandalled feet, and passing through the cool landscape with her greyhound by her side, her quiver full of arrows across her back, her unerring bow in her hand, her silver crescent on her brow, and a dead fawn on her shoulder. Very different from the divine lady was the vision which now greeted my eyes, as, turning round rather suddenly, I saw Miss Dunn stealing behind the trees. I took fire at the thought of her impertinent watchfulness, and walked straight up to her.

"I am so glad it is you," said Miss Dunn, very coolly; "do you know, Miss Carr, I got quite frightened when I heard a footstep on the stairs.

I really thought I must see who it was. Dear Miss Russell is so nervous about thieves and burglars."

To this plausible explanation I could oppose nothing—Miss Dunn was too much for me, as usual.

"I could not sleep," I answered, a little sulkily.

"Of course not," promptly responded Miss Dunn, as if not to sleep were the natural thing. "How can one sleep? Every thing is so exciting! That fern-show was too much for poor dear Miss Russell, and I feel sure the luncheon at Gray's House this morning will upset her—only, what can I do, Miss Carr?"

I longed to tell Miss Dunn that she could go away and leave me; but civility is full of troublesome hedges and ditches, which it requires a well-trained horse to leap over. My little trotting pony was not equal to the achievement, and all I could do was to let Miss Dunn take the tame creature's bridle, and lead it unresistingly along her own tiresome, wearisome road. It is no figure of speech to say that she took me straight home. She was so evidently determined not to let me go, that I had no alternative but to walk to the house forthwith, and all the way Miss Dunn purred her commonplaces into my ear, and wondered at this, or condoled about that, till the beauty fled from the morning, and the very music went away from the song of the birds; and the worst of it all was, that I saw Miss Dunn had watched me because she really thought there was something to discover in this early walk of mine.

I was delighted when the house was at length within sight. "Now," I thought, "I shall be rid of Miss Dunn." I was wholly mistaken.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, in a tone of genuine surprise; "there's a trunk on the terrace! Who can have arrived? Do you see it, Miss Carr? You are long-sighted, I know. Do tell me what color it is of!"

"It is a gray trunk," I replied, crossly.

"A gray trunk! Who can have a gray trunk? And is not that a carpet-bag standing by it? Do tell me what sort of a bag it is, Miss Carr. I think there is a great deal in bags—don't you?"

"No," I answered, exasperated. "I do not."

"Ah, a question of opinion; and what sort of bag is it, pray?"

"Black leather, I believe."

"A black-leather bag and a gray trunk! Who can that be? Why, of course, it is your friend mademoiselle! I remember her leather bag quite well! How delightful! And you see,

Miss Carr, there is a great deal in bags, after all!"

I heard the last words from a distance, for, on hearing the name *mademoiselle*, I flew, sprang up the three steps of the terrace, and rushed breathless into the drawing-room, where my guardian had come down to receive his sister-in-law.

"Oh, dear *mademoiselle*!" I cried, heedless of his presence. "God bless you for coming! I have been so wretched! I have missed you so! Oh, I am so glad! so glad!"

And clasping my arms more tightly than can have been pleasant about her neck, I sobbed upon her kind shoulder.

"Yes, *Mignon*, I know, I know," she said, soothingly; "why, you are quite thin and pale!" she added, putting me by to see me better.

"And yet no one can accuse Bessie of not putting the precept of early to rise in practice," dryly said Mr. de Lusignan.

His voice sobered me at once. I felt that for some reason or other my presence was an intrusion. I turned from *mademoiselle*, with my hand still clasped in hers, and looked at my guardian. His dark face was all severity and gloom, and he sat back in his chair, in an attitude so moody that my heart sank within me. Had I done wrong? Was I guilty of some strange offence? His gaze fastened on the window, and looking through it at the garden and its flowers and trees, gave mine no answer. I turned back to *mademoiselle*. And now for the first time I noticed how worn was her aspect, how heavy and sorrowful was the look of her blue eyes.

"Oh! how delightful!" said Miss Dunn, opportunely coming to the rescue; "but how tired you must be, dear *mademoiselle*, and how hungry! You must have your breakfast at once. Had you a rough passage? How charming that you came to-day! We are all going to Gray's House to luncheon. So charming that you did not come to-morrow."

"You are very kind," quietly replied *mademoiselle*, "but I feel rather tired; I shall not be able to accompany you anywhere to-day. I hope Miss Russell is quite well."

"Oh! so well, and in such good spirits! It is quite refreshing to think how she does keep her spirits. She will be so delighted, *mademoiselle*, at your arrival, and so grieved at your not being able to accompany us to Gray's House!"

Raising his moody head, my guardian now said, sarcastically:

"How will she manage the two, Miss Dunn! How will she be both grieved and delighted?"

"Oh! *Pun après l'autre*, of course," very coolly answered Miss Dunn, whose blue eyes had a gleam of defiance; "and now I shall give orders for *mademoiselle's* breakfast."

She left us, and the door had scarcely closed upon her when my guardian, stamping his foot, exclaimed vehemently:

"What does she mean by calling you *mademoiselle*? Have you no name? What does she mean?"

He looked so furious that I stepped back. I felt frightened, and especially amazed, at so much wrath for so slight an offence. Foolish amazement! I might have known that when anger cannot be spoken, it will catch at any thing and turn it into a mortal injury. But, as I said, I was almost afraid, and stammering something about not intruding any longer upon them, I left the drawing-room.

I was dressing to go to Gray's House when I saw *mademoiselle* again. I thought it was Elizabeth coming in to give me a critical look, as she often did before dinner, and I said, "Come in," without turning round from the glass before which I was standing. I was trying a rose which she had given me after breakfast, and I said, gravely:

"I am not going to wear it, Elizabeth; but I like to see how it looks, you know."

"It looks well, *Mignon*," answered the voice of *mademoiselle*; "why not wear it?"

I dropped the rose as if pricked to the quick by its thorns, and turned round in some confusion.

"I am in black," I said, gravely, "and—and I have no mind for roses."

"Yes, *Mignon*, you have had a great trouble, I know. Tell me all about it."

My heart opened at the kind tones of her voice. She had sat down in the one arm-chair in my room. I drew a little low seat to her knees, and I poured forth all my sorrow to her patient hearing.

"It is so hard," I said to her again and again, "it is so very hard. James Carr was my only relation, and my only friend; and now he is dead, and he never knew how much I loved him! And now I feel so lonely—oh! so lonely without him."

"Yes, *Mignon*, he was the friend of your youth, and you loved him dearly; but, after all, you had not the power to make him happy!"

"But I ought to have had that power!" I exclaimed, in a burst of remorse. "I ought not to have cared about myself. I ought not to have been so selfish, and that is why I feel so wretched."

Mademoiselle looked down at me very thoughtfully.

"Mignonne," she said, putting her hand under my chin, and thus making my face look up to hers, "do you really regret not having married him?"

"Oh!" I cried, rather startled, "how can I regret that? When you know how jealous poor dear James was, and how he worried me!"

She smiled down at me very kindly.

"Poor, little Mignonne," she said, "you have a kind heart and a sensitive conscience; but, after all, you are true to yourself, and you do well—you do well, Mignonne. There is nothing like it."

It was a wonderful relief to hear mademoiselle tell me this. With her clear reason and firm judgment, she was as a second conscience to me. But I wanted to be miserable, after the fashion of the young, for I began a fresh moan.

"If even I had Polly," I lamented; "but she would not stay with me, and she only cares for what I can give her. She was as cross as could be on the day of the fern-show, because her doll had not come."

Mademoiselle asked, in some surprise, who was Polly; and I told her, lamenting the hard-heartedness of that young maiden, and, also, rather jealously commenting upon her preference for Mr. Herbert.

"Why does she like him so much, and me not at all?" I argued. "I do not think he cares greatly about her, and I should be so fond of her—if she would only let me!"

"So he went to Australia!" said mademoiselle, very gravely. "What took him there? He can scarcely have reached the country when he left it, and came back here to be a great man, and buy Gray's House. That is a change from the poor, struggling painter whom we knew at Fontainebleau, Mignonne."

"He is not much altered, mademoiselle—I mean, he is just the same, or, rather, he scarcely says a word now. He is very grave and silent."

"Then he is not happy?"

"He does not seem unhappy, mademoiselle—only silent. He was only cheerful once, and that was at the mill."

Mademoiselle was in the questioning mood, for I had to tell her minutely the story of that day. Purposely I avoided dwelling on the flight of Elizabeth, but, I dare say, she knew about it already.

"And so you think he does not care any more about Mrs. Henry de Lusignan?" she said, thoughtfully, as I ended. "The more's the pity—the more's the pity!" And she sighed.

"Not care about her?" I exclaimed, opening my eyes wide; "why, of course he loves her more than ever."

"Then I suppose he comes here often?"

"Not very often. But, of course, he cannot come as often as he would wish to come."

"But he is very attentive to Mrs. Henry de Lusignan?"

"He would be, if it were not for Mr. Gray, and Miss Russell, and Miss Dunn, you know."

"Mr. Gray? Ah, I dare say Mr. Herbert is jealous and sulky."

"But he ought not to be jealous," I argued, a little impatiently. "It is not his way to be sulky."

"Not jealous, Mignonne. And yet, as you say, he loves her more than ever."

"Of course he does!" I exclaimed, amazed at mademoiselle's seeming doubt.

"Then he has told you so, Mignonne."

"How could he, mademoiselle? But, though he will not confess it, of course I know it."

"Ah! very true," she said, smiling kindly. "And now, Mignonne, why not put the rose in your hair? I think it would look well."

"So Elizabeth says," I answered, with a sigh, "but that is only because she likes me."

Mademoiselle was silent a while; then she said, slowly and leisurely:

"Mignonne, what I have to say is not pleasant to tell, not pleasant to hear; but there is no shunning it. I wish I could be silent, but I cannot. Do not trust Mrs. Henry de Lusignan too much. I do not say that she would either deceive or betray you, but she does not trust you, and the friend who does not trust is no friend."

I could not bear this, perhaps because I felt it was so true; I started nervously to my feet, and, while tears rushed to my eyes, I cried:

"I know that Elizabeth loves me—I know she does!"

"She does not trust you," said mademoiselle, rising; "she trusts no one—she cannot," she added, with a firm, clear look. "And now, Mignonne, I dare say it is time to go. Do not be vexed with me—time will show."

I hung my head abashed, but I could not deny that mademoiselle's plain speaking had rather displeased me. I am a bad dissembler, and it was well for me that Elizabeth and I did not meet till we entered Miss Russell's carriage, and drove off to Gray's House. Mr. de Lusignan preferred walking, he said, and he looked so gloomy that he might have added that he preferred not being in our company. Elizabeth was in the lightest of spirits, and neither seemed to

miss him nor to perceive that I was silent and depressed; she chatted gayly with Miss Russell, who was very airy, and they both ignored Miss Dunn and her commonplaces till she took the hint and looked out at the landscape, smiling to herself in rather a peculiar fashion. I have always fancied that Miss Dunn had private intelligence of the doings of the people around her, though neither then nor later could I fathom the means through which she procured it; and I am sure that when Elizabeth and Miss Russell thus put her by, she already knew of the disappointment which awaited them at the end of their journey.

The last time I had seen Gray's House, I had seen it shut up and lonely, a deserted dwelling seeming to sleep its useless life away in a green wilderness. But now its windows were all glancing in the morning sun; some were half-open, and the muslin curtains within waved to and fro in the pleasant westerly wind. The noble elms of the avenue that led to the house spread their mighty boughs in quiet majesty, and the lawn beyond them was bathed in golden sunshine, and ended in beds of blushing roses. I remembered James saying to me, "You like roses," and I hung my head to hide the tears that started to my eyes.

Mr. Herbert and Mrs. Thomas Gray came out to receive Miss Russell as she was carried up the steps of Gray's House; and in her pompous style Mrs. Thomas Gray poured forth her welcome and made her lament.

"I am so glad you see Gray's House in perfection, dear Miss Russell," she said; "for the style of Gray's House requires sunshine, and nothing can be more brilliant than this morning," she added, in a tone that seemed to appropriate Gray's House, the sun, and the very breezes. "But, as nothing mortal can be perfect," she continued in her solemn jesting manner, "Mr. Gray and Mr. Thomas Gray received this morning a telegram which, to their inexpressible despair, called them to town, without a moment's delay on pressing business. For, of course, you know, my dear madam, that Pressing Business makes it a rule to intrude upon poor Pleasure as much as he can."

Not a whit softened by all this solemn graciousness, not mollified even by the playful allegory with which Mrs. Thomas Gray concluded her speech, Miss Russell looked hard at her, and said, shortly:

"I know that Mr. Gray and Mr. Thomas Gray are both precious afraid of dying at Gray's House.—Wheel me in, Brown." And be-

fore Mrs. Thomas Gray had recovered from her amazement, Miss Russell was wheeled past her into the hall, and thence into the dining-room.

Mr. Herbert bit his lip in order not to smile, and Miss Dunn half shut her sleepy eyes, and looked at Elizabeth, who colored deeply. She felt to the quick the slight to her beauty. How dare Mr. Gray, how dare even Mr. Thomas Gray, voluntarily avoid her presence, and allow any fear to prevail over its charm? Was she not Queen of Hearts by the divinest of all rights?

The luncheon had every thing to make it perfect. It was very good to begin with, and Gray's House was in my eyes at least a delightful place. But the defection of the two brothers spoiled every thing, luncheon and all, so far as Miss Russell and Elizabeth were concerned. Miss Russell was abominably cross, and did not care to hide either her ill-humor or its cause. The displeasure of Elizabeth was shown in a languid indifference to every thing and to every one, but especially to Mr. Herbert.

I felt very sorry for him, yet if he had been deaf and blind, he could not have seemed more unconscious than he did of her annoyance or its motive. His manner was very perplexing. It seemed to me as if his eyes could not leave Elizabeth, and yet I could neither speak nor stir but I found him aware of what I said, or watchful of what I did. My guardian too was all vigilance, but had eyes for nothing, and no one save his beautiful daughter-in-law. His watchfulness was so marked that I could not help thinking of a great big tomcat keeping his eye on a reckless young mouse, and ever ready to stretch out his paw upon her. Spite all these drawbacks, I enjoyed myself. I did not miss either Mr. Gray or his brother, and the pomposity of Mrs. Thomas Gray, the ill-temper of Miss Russell, the coldness of Elizabeth, and the insipidity of Miss Dunn, could not take away from the charm of Gray's House. It seemed to me as if all the tumult of the great world of cities, as if all the cares of life and all its troubles, must die away ere they reached this favored dwelling. It was so old, so tranquil, so brown, so harmonious! Surely grief could never wander beneath these majestic trees, or sit down in those rooms, to which passing generations had bequeathed every charm that once adorned them, but had not left one token or one trace of their sorrows! Mrs. Thomas Gray pleaded a little gentle fatigue and remained below, but Miss Russell would be carried up every stair and wheeled through every room, and Mr. Herbert showed her and us about with quiet courtesy and good-humor.

"I dare say you do not know your own house yet, Mr. Herbert!" very impertinently remarked Mr. de Lusignan.

Mr. Herbert smiled, and as usual did not take up the glove; but Miss Russell, delighted to put down my guardian, turned round and said with a stare:

"My goodness, Mr. de Lusignan! don't you know that Mr. Herbert's grandmother was a Gray, and that he was reared in this very house till he was ten years old?"

"I was not aware of it," said Mr. de Lusignan, dryly.

"But how odd that you should not be aware of it!" persisted the pitiless lady; "I thought you were just the man to know every thing about every one." And, without giving him time to retort: "Wheel me on, Brown; open that door.—What! nothing to see there, do you say, Mr. Herbert? I shall see something, depend upon it."

And there was something to be seen, after all, for this was a painting-room, and it was full of paintings. And there was actually one, a half-finished picture, on the easel.

I looked at Mr. Herbert, who reddened and laughed uneasily.

"Oh, how sweet!" exclaimed Miss Dunn, clasping her hands. "O Mr. Herbert, how clever you are!"

"Well, I declare, Mr. Herbert is a genius!" said Miss Russell, as she looked around her in amazement; "and so many of them too!"

"There's a feather in your cap, Mr. Herbert!" said Elizabeth, ironically; "so many of them!"

I do not know if Mr. Herbert heard her. He was still looking at me, with a vexed yet amused look.

"How could you tell me that you had given it up?" I asked, as he came nigh me.

"So I had," he replied, deprecatingly; "and indeed I do not intend—"

"All very fine," here remarked Miss Russell, "but I am no judge of paintings.—Wheel me out, Brown."

"And I don't care about them," said Elizabeth, laughing, and looking mischievous.

I longed to linger and look at some of my old friends whom I recognized there—the Charlemagne, the Pharamond, the Fountain of the Sanguinède, but Mr. Herbert seemed no more inclined to display his paintings than his guests to see them, and we were out of the room, and the door was closed upon us before I could utter one word of remonstrance.

"You shall see them another time if you

like," said Mr. Herbert to me, as he read the disappointment in my face.

"What!" sharply exclaimed my guardian, turning round; but Mr. Herbert, nothing daunted, quietly repeated:

"Miss Carr shall see them another time, if she likes it."

Mr. de Lusignan walked on without adding another word. I could read in his dark face that nothing pleased him which he saw, while I was charmed with every thing and every room, from that with wainscot of brown oak, in which we took our luncheon, to the distant library with Gothic windows, one of which opened almost above the little river, and showed me, at the end of a green arch of trees, the black wheel of the old mill, and a sheet of water rolling under in white foam.

"Very pretty," said Miss Russell, "but damp."

"Yes, but so sweet!" murmured Miss Dunn.

"Damp!" persisted Miss Russell.—"Wheel me out, Brown."

Elizabeth was standing in one of the windows, and thence looking down at the tranquil water below.

"This is the room I like best," I whispered, stealing behind her; "how do you like it?"

"Oh, so much! One could take such a good dip in that river, when one was tired," she answered coolly, and walked away.

"Tired of what?" I asked, following her.

"Of life," promptly said Mr. de Lusignan, without giving her time to answer. "Don't you know, Bessie, that life is a constant cheat, and that one cannot help getting tired of it now and then?"

Elizabeth had reached the threshold of the open door. She paused and looked round at her father-in-law, giving him a look of supreme amazement and disdain; then walked on. Mr. de Lusignan gnawed his lip and followed her. I stood petrified, and remained alone with Mr. Herbert.

"O Mr. Herbert!" I exclaimed, "is it not dreadful?"

"Where is the help for it now?" he asked, composedly. "And so this is the room you like best. Why so?"

I had no time to answer. My guardian was calling me rather sharply, and I obeyed at once. We had seen every thing, and now went out to look at the roses that grew in rare luxuriance and beauty around the house. Even as she went down the steps, Elizabeth, with sudden and irresistible despotism, took possession of Mr. Her-

bert. Never had she been more gracious, more amiable, and especially more lovely; and at once, and spite of his cool declaration, uttered to me a few minutes back, he was in her toils. In vain, Mr. de Lusignan looked black—neither heeded him. I gazed at them both amazed; then quietly stole away, and, turning round the house, went on to the mill.

I walked by the little river, in the shade of the tall old trees that grew on either of its banks, and whose boughs, meeting high above it, kept it in perpetual bloom and freshness. On the other side of the stream spread a wide and lovely pasture, in which a milk-white cow, and a black one, glossy as ebony, stood knee-deep, looking at me with their full, dark eyes. The little river flowed with a gentle murmur at my feet, with here and there a gleam of sunshine piercing the green gloom of its cool waters. I stood looking and listening and wondering at Elizabeth's gloomy fancy. "Oh, I was not tired of life yet—oh, no!"

This thought led me on to another, and instead of going on to the mill, I stood and mused till a sound of steps roused me. I turned round and was filled with dismay as I saw Polly standing behind me with her maid. I had inquired after Polly, and been much pleased to learn that she had gone to spend the day with Ellinor, who was now a resident of Hanvil. By what unfortunate chance had Polly returned? Before I could recover from the guilty confusion into which her sudden appearance had thrown me, Polly accosted me with an inquiring "Well?" more imperative than polite.

"Well, Polly," I replied, as cheerfully and as airily as I could, "that tiresome doll has not come yet. Very provoking—is it not? How is Ellinor?" I asked, policy suggesting the theme as one likely to soothe Polly.

"Ellinor is at school," answered Polly, very crossly. "Will she come to-morrow?" she continued, without transition.

"You don't mean Ellinor, Polly, do you?"

"Of course I don't."

"Oh! the doll, then! Well, Polly, I wish I could say that I shall have her to-morrow, but I fear not—on my word, Polly, I have done my best."

Polly looked straight before her and walked on a few steps; I walked humbly enough by her side; then Polly, standing suddenly still in front of me, said very deliberately:

"I don't believe she is coming—I don't believe she will ever come at all!" added Polly, rising in her indignation at my duplicity to the strongest negative she could express in speech.

I was the more confounded at this attack that it was overheard by the whole party, now coming toward us after visiting the mill, Miss Russell and Miss Dunn foremost; Elizabeth and Mr. Herbert lingering behind; and my guardian keeping aloof, but watching all like an evil spirit.

"What is it you don't believe, darling?" sweetly asked Miss Dunn, hastening to come forward.

"She is always telling me *such* stories about my doll," exclaimed Polly, with an indignant sob, "and I know she has not got it—I know she has not!" cried Polly, getting red in the face.

Miss Dunn burst into a peal of musical laughter, and I was childish enough to feel tears of mortification rising to my eyes. Mr. Herbert, though he only now joined us, seemed to know by intuition all that had been said.

"Nonsense, Polly!" he remarked, with careless good-humor; "why, your doll is waiting for you in a box at home. Run off and look at her; be quick, I say!"

If Polly was amazed at this conclusion, so was I. I looked at Mr. Herbert, and thanked him with that silent look, and no more was said about Polly or her doll.

"And now that we have eaten Mr. Herbert's luncheon, and seen his house and his mill, I suppose we may be off with ourselves," remarked Miss Russell.

"Is not there a farm somewhere or other?" asked Elizabeth, opening her eyes and looking round her, as if she expected to find the said farm starting into existence at her bidding.

"O Mr. Herbert does not want to show us his farm to-day," coolly responded Miss Russell.—"Wheel me on, Brown."

"But I must see the farm," cried Elizabeth, with pretty despotism; "which way is it, Mr. Herbert?"

"Mr. Herbert need not take so much trouble," very coolly said my guardian; "we are all going home with Miss Russell."

The blue eyes of Elizabeth had a flash, but it died away into gentle languor.

"Well, I think I am tired," she said with a little sigh, "so the farm must wait."

She turned to Mr. Herbert with her kindest look, as much as to say:

"I go, because I cannot help myself, you know!" And her whole aspect was so frankly kind that my guardian looked, as he no doubt felt, very sour, and he gave me proof of his feelings before the day was ended.

"What a house that Gray's House is!" suddenly said Miss Russell at dinner that evening.

"Oh! perfect, is it not?" I cried with sudden ardor, and speaking so vehemently that every eye was turned to my end of the table.

"Perfect!" she echoed; "damp, damp, feverish! No wonder all the Grays died there."

I do not know whether Elizabeth spoke her real feelings, or only wished to contradict Miss Russell, when she said with a smile:

"It is a house to live and die in, Miss Russell!"

"And yet I am afraid you will never see it again, Elizabeth," dryly said Mr. de Lusignan.

There was a dead silence. His daughter-in-law paused in the act of raising her glass to her lips, and looked at him fixedly, and that was all. When dinner was over I went out into the garden. Elizabeth soon followed me.

"You heard him," she said in a low tone, as she took my arm and pressed it. "You heard him! Well, then, I will do any thing—I will marry Mr. Herbert before I bear any longer with this yoke."

Her eyes sparkled through her tears, her lips quivered, her cheeks were flushed with emotion. I was going to speak, but she left me without giving me time to answer, as she saw mademoiselle coming toward us. Mademoiselle too had something to say.

"Mignonne," she said, with a wistful look, "I have often told you so—you are too open. You must be more careful; your guardian bids me tell you so. You mean no harm, but you must be more careful."

The utter confusion with which I heard this speech evidently confirmed mademoiselle in any conviction of my guilt she had already entertained, for she smiled and sighed as she added:

"And are you comforted so soon, Mignonne?"

"What!" I cried, amazed.

"Are you comforted so soon?" she repeated. "You see, Mignonne, I don't think so, but your guardian is convinced it is all Gray's House, and you know that he will not hear of any thing of the kind while you are under his care."

My grief, my indignation, as her meaning thus dawned upon me, were inexpressible. At first I could not speak.

"Oh! is it possible!" I cried, at length—"is it possible, and do *you* think that of me, mademoiselle?"

My *et tu Brute* did not seem to produce much effect upon her.

"Mignonne," she said, calmly, "I think nothing. Only your guardian thinks that Mr. Herbert is very attentive to you; and you know, Mignonne, he always was."

"Attentive to *me*!" I began; and then I checked myself, feeling how imprudent was such vehement and emphatic denial.

"Is he not, then?" she asked.

"Oh! yes, yes, very attentive," I said, with suspicious eagerness; "but, you know, he does not care about me."

"Not at all, Mignonne?"

"No," I answered, unhesitatingly, "not at all."

She gave me a perplexed look, but my eyes could meet hers quite firmly, and it was quite triumphantly that I repeated:

"He does not care for me at all. He never cared for me less than he does now."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHEN I went up to my room that night, the first thing I did was, like the girl in the Scotch ballad, to sit me down and cry. I do not think that even then I was unusually given to tears, but some of the things that had taken place that day were too much for my fortitude. To be taxed with liking Gray's House—to be told that Mr. Herbert was attentive to me, when no one knew better than I did that all his thoughts were centred on Elizabeth, was hard; but the hardest of all, as I felt in my inmost heart and conscience, was the loneliness which, swift as night after a long, bright day, was stealing over me. Elizabeth would marry Mr. Herbert; she had said so, and what she had said would come to pass. Could I doubt, after what I had seen, and spite of what I had heard, that, if she wished it, he would be once more at her feet, her servant and her slave, and—where should I be then? Not with them—never with them. Elizabeth was not altered. She liked me, she had watched faithfully by my sick-bed, but, though I could not think her liking for Mr. Herbert very strong or deep, I knew she would tolerate nothing and no one between herself and her husband. I was not old and not wise enough to feel that she was right, and that in love and in marriage it must be so. I only felt the hardship of my lot, the bitterness of losing my two friends at one blow. No fond worship on my part would give me the confidence of Elizabeth, or allow me a share, though small, in the liking of the man she married. Already their love had cost me the love of James Carr, and, after having caused between him and me a parting which Death had sealed and now made eternal, it would leave me forever desolate. I was too proud to forget the

past, and Elizabeth's jealous mistrust of me; and, remembering this, I knew my fate. I found it hard. I had done all I could, little though that was, to win back the liking of his wayward mistress to Mr. Herbert; but perhaps I had been so zealous because I had not thought success so easy. Had I been sure of it, I would have done no less, for I liked him in my heart, and had always felt that his liking for me was both tender and sincere; but then it was very hard to give up that liking once more, to give up Elizabeth, and to remain alone with the memory of James Carr dying alienated, and far away. Mademoiselle was very good and kind, but there was a great gap of years forever yawning between us—a gap which, do what we would, neither of us could fill up.

If I had only been of a magnanimous turn, I could have found some comfort in all this; for, after all, I was the victim. If I suffered, it was because others were blest; if I was lonely, it was that my two friends might enjoy the sweetest of companionship. But I was not magnanimous at all. I was glad for them, but bitterly sorry for myself—bitterly sorry never to see their two kind faces again—bitterly sorry for Polly, spite her ingratitude, and for Gray's House, which I—oh, mortification unspeakable, had actually been accused of coveting! Was it wonderful, then, that I sat down and cried, having such thoughts—nay, that I cried myself to sleep?

For, after all, I slept. Oh! glorious and divine privilege of youth, that cannot be wakeful, which no care, no sorrow, can divorce from that sweet bed-fellow Sleep. And I slept soundly, too, all the more soundly for my tears, until a sun-beam, stealing through my window-blind, fell on my lids and woke me.

That day, which was to be an eventful one in my life and in that of others, began very tamely. Elizabeth looked tired and dull; Miss Russell had a headache, and kept her room; Mr. de Lusignan went out early, and mademoiselle had letters to write. I wanted to lure Elizabeth out, but she yawned, looked at the sky, said it would rain, and declined. The sun which had wakened me was indeed early overcast by heavy clouds, and the aspect of the day soon grew sullen and threatening. Still I teased Elizabeth to come out into the garden with me—the truth was, I wished to speak to her without fear of interruption; but there again I failed—either Elizabeth guessed my wish, and had no fancy to gratify it, or she was really disinclined for a walk, for she gave me a flat denial, and suddenly remembering that she, too, had letters to write, she retired to

her room, as to a citadel which I could not invade. I made no attempt to do so—I was rather disheartened at the decided rebuff my overtures had got, and sat in my room alone for the best part of the morning, reading, or rather trying to read. At length I could bear this no longer, and, spite the cloudy grayness of the sky, I went out. I did not venture on a walk in the country—my guardian having rather curtly informed me that solitary promenades were not to his fancy; but Miss Russell's garden, orchard, and grounds being free to me, I went to the lake, as to the loveliest haunt her demesnes could afford. There I sat down on the grass and tried to think; but thought would not come. The sadness of the day and the sadness of my own heart were too much for me. This gray day, sunless and chill, had a look of Autumn, and seemed one of her early harbingers. It was as if Autumn were coming, not as she comes sometimes, with golden sunshine round her head, and mellow fruit in her lap, but as she appears too often to us northerners, with aspect sad and wild, with gray clouds sweeping along a stormy sky, and chill breezes whistling through rustling boughs, and swallows and wild-geese preparing to wing their flight to warmer climes. "Ah! if I too could only go away," I thought; "go somewhere and leave trouble behind me as the swallows leave falling leaves, and weeping skies, and sodden earth! If I only could!"

Mr. Herbert's quick step made me start to my feet, for, even without looking round, I knew it was he who was coming. What had brought him, and especially what had brought him here? He carried a sketch-book in his hand. Had he come to draw the little lake? It seemed likely, yet, when he walked straight up to me, he gave me no immediate explanation of his presence in this spot. It was only after the usual greetings that he said:

"Mrs. Henry de Lusignan has changed her mind, I fear."

I had presence of mind enough not to seem ignorant of his meaning, but to answer that I feared so.

"It is a lady's privilege," he said, smiling, "and one to which man must submit."

"And yet you are disappointed," I remarked, looking at him attentively.

"Yes," he answered, quietly, "I am."

He was patient as usual, but I knew that he suffered. My heart beat. I felt as if his happiness lay in my hand, and I had but to open it to make him blest—at last.

"A woman has many minds," I said, slowly

and deliberately ; "and some rise uppermost, and others, often the truest, lie deep."

I spoke so that every word I uttered had a meaning. He gave me a quick, sharp look of sudden surprise, but was silent.

"And what one mind dislikes to-day, the other mind may prize to-morrow," I continued.

Mr. Herbert colored up to the roots of his hair.

"You have a meaning," he said, plainly ; "what is it?"

I was rather frightened at his direct questioning.

"If I have a meaning, as you say," I replied, a little troubled, "you must guess it."

The color faded away rapidly from his face. He stood by my side, looking down on the earth and gnawing his nether lip, like one perplexed and at fault ; at length he looked up and said :

"Yesterday I asked, I entreated Elizabeth to meet me here and listen to me. She let me hope that she would come ; but, though I have been here twice already, she is not coming, and she will not come. There is a secret and a danger in her life, and such is her misfortune that I who know both can only utter vague words of warning, which she disregards. She will mind nothing, not even Mr. de Lusignan's dark face, and so she rushes on to her fate, and I, her friend, must see her undoing. It is hard, very hard, but I am powerless. I told you once that the thread of water which flowed between Elizabeth and me had become a river, and was widening into a sea, but a river can be forded, a sea can be crossed, and now—now," he added, with evident emotion, "we are as two travellers who have met once, and neither of whom can turn back. Every step we take parts us more and more. I can still catch a glimpse of her when I stand and look behind me, but already she is very far away, and the time is coming fast when, look as hard and as long as I can, I shall see her no more."

Tears rushed to my eyes at so unexpected a conclusion.

"O Mr. Herbert !" I exclaimed, and it was all I could say.

"It seems hard, but it must be so," he said ; "and I believe, Miss Carr, that life is made up of such things."

His "Miss Carr," uttered rather coldly, recalled me to myself.

"I beg your pardon," I said, awkwardly, "I am afraid you must think me a very meddlesome person. I shall offend so no more."

His silence and downcast eyes seemed both to confirm the fact that Mr. Herbert did think me a

very meddlesome person, and yet when he looked up there was nothing unkind in his eyes.

"I may as well speak plainly once for all," he said, deliberately ; "for, unless I do so, you will never understand. Circumstances parted us in Fontainebleau ; and now, the reason for which she and I must follow different paths, is that she never cared for me, and that, if I liked her once, there is another woman now whom I like ten times more than ever I liked her."

I heard him amazed, and then, as his meaning flashed across my mind, I stepped back in sudden grief and fear.

"Oh ! do not say that," I cried ; "do not, never say that again—never !"

He bit his lip, and did not answer at once.

"I knew it would be so," he replied, in a low, vexed tone. "There seems a perversity in such things. Poor James Carr loved you dearly, and you were afraid of him, and did not care for him till he died ; and then—then it was exasperating," he added, with a sudden flush, "to see how you grieved for him."

"Why should I not grieve?" I asked.

"But there is a way of grieving," he answered quickly ; "and you have grieved as if your heart were in his grave."

I did not answer ; he continued :

"When Elizabeth was the apple of my eye, you were very kind to me ; but since I have given her up and done my best to win your liking, you have grown so cold that, though I speak at last, I do so knowing that I shall amaze and alarm you. What am I to do?" he added, a little angrily ; "I can only like a woman, show her that I like her, and, if she will not understand me, tell her so at last."

"But you must not like me," I exclaimed, with a sort of anguish—"that's just it. You must never like me, Mr. Herbert. I am the friend of Elizabeth ; I am the last of all women who must rob her of your liking. She has had faith in me—"

"No !" he sharply interrupted ; "never !—neither in you nor in me, Miss Carr. She was jealous of you—as jealous," he added, correcting himself, "as a woman can be without love ; for, you know, she never cared for me."

Alas ! I did not know that at all, but I could not betray her to him—it was impossible. I felt the most miserable being alive, and I suppose he saw it, for he sighed and said :

"I must not persecute you ; and yet—I do not give you up. We could be so happy—believe me, we could be so happy together."

What was there in the words that gave them

an eloquence so sudden and so irresistible that I felt beside myself! His voice and his looks were very persuasive. I shook like a leaf in a strong wind, tears rushed to my eyes, and, with a sense of my weakness, I put my hands before me to put him, his love, and the dangerous flattery of his wooing away, as far as I could, away from me.

"Do not," I said—"do not!"

"Why not?" he asked, eagerly—"why should we not be happy together?"

Surely there is witchcraft in the simplest words of love—surely there is honey on the tongue of the man who loves, or I should not have felt myself growing very weak—so weak that in my anguish and despair I cried:

"Do not tempt me!—be generous. I do not like you, indeed I do not, but I am very lonely, and I often feel too miserable. Do not tempt me, lest I should forget my honor and my faith."

"You ask me to be generous," he replied, with some passion; "what man can or will be so, when the thing he is asked to give up is the creature he loves best? I am not generous; I will not be so; but I will not tempt you, as you call it, for I could not bear to get you because you feel, as you say, so lonely. I could not bear that you should come to me as to a refuge," he added, his lip quivering as he spoke—"a man to be endured for the sake of his roof, to be detested by fits when it is no longer needed, or despised all day long for his meanness in selling that roof so dear! On those terms I will never have you—never—never! But can I not have you otherwise?" he added, with sudden gentleness. "You speak of honor and faith—what barriers have they placed between us? And if you cared for me half as much as you care little, why should honor and faith divide us?"

"Oh, how can you ask it?" I cried in my turn, roused to something like passion. "Do you not know that in Fontainebleau the thing you would have me do was imputed to me as a treason and a sin? Elizabeth did not care for you—granted, but still she held it falsehood in me to seek, as she thought, for your regard; and if I robbed, or seemed to rob her of it now, would not she—would not the world think so still?"

"No," he answered, without a second's hesitation, and so coolly, that I was confounded. "We will not argue that point," he resumed; "I dare say I could not convince you, but what I could not do, time will. Only remember this: What is true of me is as true of you—Elizabeth and you have met, and are already going each on

her different road, to meet no more. Remember it, Bessie," he added, with compassionate tenderness; "never again will you two be as you have been, and the last hour, which has long ago come for me, will soon come for you."

I heard him with the keenest grief, for I felt in my heart that he spoke the truth, and that the fate he had laid before me was already being accomplished. A great pang seized me, and with it a sense of such utter desolation that I hid my face in my hands, and, turning my head away, I cried bitterly. Mr. Herbert made no attempt to soothe the sorrow he had wakened. He uttered not a word, but stood silently by my side, and when, checking my tears, I turned back to him, I found him looking at me—rather sadly, it is true, but very gravely.

"Why do you tell me these things?" I cried, almost angrily; "do you think I shall like you any better because you show me that I have, and must have, nothing left?—that my friend, she whom I loved and still love so dearly, does not care for me?"

"I never meant that," he said, quickly; "God forbid! How could so warm-hearted and generous a creature as Elizabeth not love you? But, Miss Carr, friendship is like love—however true, however warm it may be, there are inexorable laws of life that forbid it between some. And depend upon it, no one knows that better than Elizabeth herself. What man can accuse her of having sought his love? What woman can tax her with having tried to win her friendship? What came to her she received as a queen may receive the homage of her subjects, but did she ever offer any thing in return? You have no more her confidence than I had, and yet *you* surely have every gift which could win her, if she was to be won. You are unselfish and devoted, and you forget yourself in her presence as naturally as a daisy in the grass might forget itself in the presence of a garden rose. You give all, and you ask for nothing in return; and you do well, for Elizabeth has it not to give."

"And yet you say she is warm-hearted," I exclaimed, very indignantly.

He was silent a while.

"She had once much to give," he answered, after a pause; "but some women can give but once, and to one only, just as there are flowers that open but for the day, and then only to the sun."

"I cannot bear this!" I said, impetuously, I cannot bear it!"

I turned away; he understood me, and let me go. He bowed as I passed him, but stood still.

And so I went on swiftly, with tears in my eyes, and walking as fast as if, with every step, my feet were leaving this new trouble behind them.

CHAPTER XL.

BEFORE I had walked ten minutes I stood still—I could not go farther—I did not look round, I felt sure he was not following me, and he could not see me where I was. I slipped down on the grass, and, clasping my hands around my knees, I bowed my head upon my lap.

Let us ever pity them who are tempted, for the fight is a hard one, and the world, who sees, and is so prompt to censure the fall, rarely sees the struggle, and can never reckon the full cost of victory. One of the keenest temptations which my youth had known was clinging to me then, with the grasp of a falcon on its prey. I could not help it; with my whole soul, with my whole heart and being, I longed to say "yes" to the thing which Mr. Herbert had put within my yea and nay; no involuntary impulse made me turn to him with irresistibly longing, but I pined to give myself up to him, and to be forever at rest in his keeping. It seemed to me as if the death of James Carr, as if the inevitable abandonment of Elizabeth, could not be forgotten, but buried silently in the depths of that new life. Ah! he had said it truly—we could be so happy together! My heart leaped at the picture these words called up—a life of calm love and tranquil delights. I saw it spreading far away into the grayness of age, a lovely, golden sea, on which the sun ever shone, with waves that should never be roused to wrath by storms of jealous passion! And what stood between me and all this? Elizabeth, who did not love, who had never loved Mr. Herbert, and whom Mr. Herbert loved no longer. Surely, I was free to stretch out my hand and have it; surely, there was neither shame, nor sin, nor dishonor, in taking that which was not hers? Ah! if Mr. Herbert had been by me then, and could have read my heart, how easy would have been his triumph over all my denials!—how faint a "nay" would have answered his entreaties! But I was alone, and might be weak with utter impunity; I was alone, and might regret having been so generous and so strong as to deny myself for one who would neither know of nor care for my denial. Shame at my useless weakness overtook me. Where was the use of yielding, when there was no one to press me into consent? I rose, thrusting back every tempting regret, and

walked on, arguing away those fond fancies which were insidiously stealing all strength, all nobleness from me. In the name of womanly honor, in the name of trusting friendship, I bade them begone, and haunt me no more! I was calm again when I reached the house. On the terrace I met Miss Dunn.

"I am so glad to find you," she said, with a sigh of relief. "Dear Miss Russell's head is distracted, and Mr. de Lusignan has sent out three times for you. I was going for you myself; but I am so glad to meet you, dear Miss Russell cannot bear me to be out of her sight, you know."

I asked, rather faintly, where my guardian was. I had a terrible fear that he had gained some unaccountable knowledge of my interview with Mr. Herbert, and was going to call me to an account. Miss Dunn's answer, that he was in the drawing-room with mademoiselle, rather comforted me—no great harm could befall me if she was there; and yet, when leaving Miss Dunn, who looked at me very curiously, I entered the drawing-room, my heart beat. My guardian had been so moody of late that it seemed as if I might expect any thing from him, and I paused at the door, as hesitatingly as any culprit facing the judge. He was standing by the chimney, with an open letter in his hand.

"Where is Elizabeth?" he said, impetuously, and taking two steps toward me as he spoke.

I shrank back, rather afraid.

"I don't know," I answered. "When she left me this morning she was going to her room to write letters."

"She never wrote a line!" he exclaimed, with the same impetuosity of tone and bearing. "She went out. With my own eyes I saw her. Where is she now?"

"Indeed, sir, I do not know."

I spoke faintly, and still kept nigh the door.

Mademoiselle, who sat nigh the farthest window, now interfered.

"You frighten Mignonne," she said, beckoning me to her, and kindly taking my hand.—"My dear," she added, looking me in the face, "all this has long been coming on, and further concealment is useless. We have every reason to fear that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan—since I must still call her so—has deceived us; that she is not my nephew's widow, that she never was his wife, that her child is not his child, and Mr. de Lusignan's grandson."

She spoke calmly, but very positively, and I stood dumb before her.

"I have suspected this all along," resumed mademoiselle, "but our own wishes are great

deluders. This falsehood was so pleasant to believe in, that both your guardian and I opened our hearts to it; and then there was the child," she added, her voice breaking down, "the child so strangely like him! And now it is over, and mother and child are strangers to our blood—aliens, with whom we have nothing in common, save the memory of a cruel wrong!"

"But it cannot be!" I cried, in a sort of despair. "Elizabeth must be his widow; and if she is not, who, then, is she?"

Mademoiselle shook her head.

"Whoever she may be," she said, "she is not, I fear, the girl whom my nephew married. I have been to the church in which their marriage took place, I have seen the parish register, and I have read there the name of Louisa Jones, written in characters weak, small, and tremulous. The same hand never wrote that name and the direction on Mr. de Lusignan's card which first set us all astray."

I sat down; spite what Mr. Herbert had told me that morning, the blow stunned me; but after a while I rallied.

"But where, then, is your nephew's wife, mademoiselle? Surely she would not let another woman take her place? It cannot be."

"She may be dead," answered mademoiselle; "indeed, I feel convinced she is. But, living or dead, she and Elizabeth are not one."

"Then who is Elizabeth?" I cried, in a sort of despair—"who is she?"

"We mean to ask her; we scarcely hope she will tell us. All we know is what she is not."

Again I said:

"It cannot be. She could not be such a deceiver."

Mademoiselle shook her head and sighed.

"I did not see the clergyman who married my nephew, when I looked over the parish register," she said, "for he had left the parish, and no one could tell me whither he was gone; but we have discovered him at last, and his answer to Mr. de Lusignan's inquiries came half an hour ago. This clergyman, Mignonne, remembers distinctly the marriage of my nephew; he remembers the year, the time of the year, the singular name of the bridegroom, his appearance, which he describes accurately, and that of the bride—a young girl, with blue eyes and flaxen hair. Do you think she was Elizabeth?"

"But he can be mistaken," I said, with a sort of despair. "He must have been marrying so many people about that time, he may have taken one girl for another."

"Then let her tell us so," said mademoiselle,

in a low, sad voice; for, even as she spoke, the folding-window opened, and Elizabeth, unconscious of the storm that had been brooding so long, entered the room smiling, and with the loveliest bouquet of hot-house flowers in her hand. There was no need to ask where they came from, for Mr. Gray, calm, elegant, and handsome as ever, followed her in. Leaving him to his greetings, Elizabeth sank in an arm-chair, looking carelessly happy.

"It is such a trying day!" she said, leaning back. "Are these orchids, Mr. Gray? No? What are they, then?"

She looked at the flowers, now lying in her lap, the rarest, the costliest which money could buy, as a young Goddess Flora might look at a bunch of weeds, the humble offering of some rural swain laid upon her altar. I have read somewhere that we rule our own destiny, it was so for Elizabeth; I have seen it again and again in her ease, I saw it then.

On seeing Mr. Gray, my guardian had thrust the clergyman's fatal letter into his pocket, and knit his dark brows with vexation at vengeance deferred; but, on seeing Elizabeth thus calm, thus triumphant, coming in with Mr. Gray in her train, and so carelessly displaying her victory over him, all his pent-up wrath broke forth. He was a man of strong passions and little self-restraint, and, without heeding mademoiselle's alarmed and appealing look, he brought forth the letter again, and looked at Elizabeth with implacable resentment in his dark eyes.

"Madam," he said, in a grave, low tone, as if he had been as calm as he was wrathful, "I will not do you the wrong of delaying one moment the question I have to put. I have ascertained beyond reasonable doubt, and that on the testimony of the clergyman by whom my late son was married, that you are not the person whom I took you for, whom I brought to my house and introduced to my friends as my lost son's widow. I cannot in honor allow any one to labor any longer under this mistake, and, though I do not doubt that you can give the best account of yourself, you will not wonder, I am sure, if I put you under the necessity to do so."

I have often wondered at the needless cruelty of this speech, coming from one who was not cruel; but he was exasperated beyond all self-control, and I believe did not know himself any longer. On hearing his first words, Elizabeth had risen to her feet, as if moved by a spring; and when he ceased, she stood as the blow had fallen upon her, with her flowers at her feet; but after a while she sat down again, and fastening

her eyes on Mr. de Lusignan's face, she said, in a low tone:

"Mr. de Lusignan, is this manly?"

"Is it true?" he asked, and he handed her the letter, which he still held.

She looked at it, then handed it back to him with a calm, defying smile. Perhaps the danger was not that which she had feared—at all events, she was herself again.

"Well," he said, "you do not deny it?"

"No," she answered, rising again and confronting him, "I do not deny it, sir!" Then, turning to Mr. Gray, who had stood and listened in silent amazement, she continued: "Be my witness! Mr. de Lusignan taxes me with not being his son's widow, and I will neither say one word, nor so much as lift up my finger to gainsay him. And now, sir," she resumed, addressing my guardian, "what next?"

"What next!" he cried, white with passion; "nothing, save who are you?"

"Don't you know?" she answered, with cool irony. "I am Mrs. Smith. You have persecuted me for months, and now, thank Heaven! it is over, and I am Mrs. Smith again!"

I suppose my guardian's anger was spent, for he took one or two turns up and down the room; then, coming back to her, said, in a low tone of regret:

"Blame yourself for all this, Elizabeth. You left me no choice. You were as a daughter to me; your child was as my child."

She interrupted him with an impatient gesture of her hand.

"I am not your son's widow," she said; "she, according to the clergyman's testimony—and Heaven forbid that I should deny it!—was flaxen-haired, and I am dark. I am not your son's widow—I never was his wife, and my child is not your grandchild. Is that what you want? Be satisfied, you have it. I defy you to say that I sought you. I defy you to say that I wanted your love or your money. I am Mrs. Smith—are you satisfied, sir?"

"Then you have nothing to tell me?"

"Nothing!" Her eyes, her lips breathed defiance as she uttered the word; then, turning again to Mr. Gray:

"After what has passed, Mr. Gray, need I say that you are free? The offer you made a while ago was made to Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law, as you thought. You now know that she was Mrs. Smith all along, and a deceiver—for, with questionable good taste, my late father-in-law thrusts you into this matter. Believe me, however," she added, softly, and with tears in

her eyes, "I should not have deceived you—no, I should not have deceived you!"

What a Circe she was, and how irresistible was the cup which she held out to the lips of her lovers! Man of the world as he was, and startling as was the revelation which had been made in his presence, Mr. Gray was evidently affected by these simple words. He went up to her, took her hand, and said:

"Whoever you may be, you are a noble creature, I am sure; and—and will you allow me to say a few words in private to you?"

Elizabeth looked at him in doubt, then assented by a silent inclination of her head. They walked out together, through the folding-window, but went no farther than the terrace. For a few minutes they stood in close converse at the farther end; then Mr. Gray took his leave, and Elizabeth stood on the terrace, as he had left her, with her eyes looking straight before her, and her hands closely clasped. At length, shaking her head as if she were putting by some baleful dream, she turned back, and, entering the house, once more stood before us. I say that she stood before us, but her gaze was fastened on Mr. de Lusignan, and I doubt if in that moment it saw either mademoiselle or me.

"Sir," she said, in a calm and steady voice, "if this house were yours, I should leave it this moment. As it is not, you will not wonder if I remain in it a few days longer—unless, indeed, Miss Russell should make me feel that I am no longer a welcome guest."

Mr. de Lusignan looked at her from the chair on which he had sunk, and sighed with a troubled air. I dare say that torrent of wrath which had rushed out of its bed in the first storm of discovery had now subsided—I believe, too, that her beauty still kept some of its old power over his heart, for it was with latent tenderness in his voice that he said:

"Elizabeth, let there be peace between us. I confess I forced this deceit upon you. Believe me, I have paid the full penalty of my error, for I have given my heart to a child who, it seems, is a stranger to me, and I am not sure that I can take it back. Only tell me who you are. I cannot believe that your long silence hides an unworthy secret. Only tell me that, and, as I said before, let there be peace between us."

He held out his hand.

"Never," she said, and her eyes flashed as she turned away. "Never so, Mr. de Lusignan. You are either the father of my dead husband, or you are nothing to my boy or me."

"Tell me who you are," he persisted, without

heeding her. "It is time yet, Elizabeth—tell me, for the boy's sake."

"I am Mrs. Smith," she answered, in a clear, cold voice; "don't you know it?"

"Elizabeth, do you know what you are doing—what you are throwing away? What name and what fortune have you to leave your child?"

"Smith, and three hundred a year," she answered with a careless laugh; "and now," she added, turning to the door, "tell Miss Russell all you please, Mr. de Lusignan, and remember that I ask and expect no mercy from you."

I saw my guardian's brow redden, but he did not answer this challenge. The door closed upon her, and for a few minutes we were all silent. Then my guardian rose, and, turning to me, he said:

"I cannot leave this house for a few days, at least. During that time I wish your intercourse with the lady who has just left the room to be as restricted as common civility allows. If I should find that this prohibition of mine is unheeded by either that lady or by you, I must naturally take you away."

And having so spoken, he too left the room. I turned to mademoiselle, who had not uttered one word all this time.

"O mademoiselle!" I said, clasping my hands, "how will all this end?"

"Heaven knows, Mignonne," she answered, looking sorely troubled. "Heaven knows, not I, for never in my life was I so perplexed."

I looked at her; but she turned her head away.

"O mademoiselle!" I said, trembling from head to foot—"do you think—I mean, do you not think that your Harry—I mean, do you suppose—"

"I suppose nothing," interrupted mademoiselle, reddening up and speaking almost passionately; "save that my darling was the soul of honor, and would not have joined O'Donnell if he had not been a free man."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE whole of that day I sat alone. No one came near me, and I could brood at leisure over all that had taken place. Two thoughts kept running in my brain, and chasing each other to weariness. "Who was Elizabeth? And was it, could it be true, that Mr. Herbert cared about me?"

And so a book lay unread on my lap, and the

hours went by unheeded. When we all met again, it was at Miss Russell's dinner-table; and Miss Dunn, being present, acted like the glass wall which divided the prince and the princess so effectually in the fairy-tale. Mr. de Lusignan and Elizabeth could be as silent to each other as they pleased, while Miss Dunn talked commonplace in a silvery voice.

"You can have no idea of poor, dear Miss Russell's state," she said, plaintively; "sometimes the pain is behind her ear, and sometimes right at the top of her head. She says she feels as if she had a grasshopper there; and really there is no knowing what she has got—now, is there? The human machine is so mysterious and complicated!"

And so Miss Dunn went on till dinner was over, and she lamented that she was compelled to leave us, and go to poor, dear Miss Russell.

She was scarcely gone when my guardian walked out into the garden without addressing a word to any of us. I could not help watching him for a while, for Harry was playing on the terrace with Watkins, and Mr. de Lusignan, though he pretended to be staring another way, was looking at him furtively. Once Harry stumbled as he ran, and I saw Mr. de Lusignan's involuntary motion toward him, as if to pick him up—a motion quickly checked, and which the assistance of Watkins rendered needless. Did Elizabeth see this? I doubt it. Mademoiselle, who looked pale and ill, had left us; and Elizabeth, after standing a while by the marble mantel-piece, said, without looking at me:

"Come up to my room, Bessie, will you?"

I followed her with a beating heart. Was she going to trust in me at last? We entered together that room to which I was so rarely summoned. How keen and vivid are the pictures which Fate draws of the places wherein she acts her dramas! I still seem to see that room as I saw it then. The grayness of the morning had melted away into sunshine, and the evening had been warm and bright. A sunset sky, spreading over masses of verdure, with low mists stealing through them, appeared in the square of the open window; while the crimson walls and furniture within looked gorgeous in the rich glow from the west. Elizabeth sat down in a deep chair facing the window, and, resting her arms on its elbows, looked straight before her. I took a chair nearly facing hers, but I do not think she saw me. At length she spoke.

"Well, Bessie," she said, "what do you think of all this?"

I rose, and, twining my arms around her

neck, I said, entreatingly: "Elizabeth, tell the truth, whatever it may be. Tell the truth."

She put me away rather coldly.

"I have nothing to tell," she said. "Mr. de Lusignan forced himself upon me, and now chooses to withdraw—let him!"

"But Harry!" I pleaded, "listen to him!" for we could hear a vehement quarrel between him and Watkins going on just then in the garden; "think of Harry."

"And so I do," she said, impatiently. "Mr. de Lusignan has left me no choice; Harry must have a step-father. May he have a kind one, Bessie!"

"Will Mr. de Lusignan allow it, Elizabeth?" I asked.

She opened her eyes.

"Why not?" she said; "don't you know that his son's wife was fair-haired, and that, since I cannot be that lady, I surely am my own mistress?"

I did not know whether Elizabeth was or was not the widow of my guardian's son, but I knew, and with infinite sorrow I knew it, that, whatever her secret might be, I was excluded from it as completely as Mr. de Lusignan himself.

"I wish you had a home to offer me, Bessie," she resumed, after a while. "I wish you were mistress of Gray's House for a fortnight or so. I should like to be out of this place for a few days, and yet not seem to run away from them all—from Miss Dunn especially. I don't mind telling you, Bessie, that she troubles me far more than Mr. de Lusignan. I know," she added, with a curl of her lip, "that he wants to keep me after all; and I know, too, that Miss Dunn has wished me out of this house from the moment I entered it. Would you believe it, Bessie, she has had the hope that, with her voice and her smoothness and all the rest of it, she could get Mr. Gray?"

Nothing could exceed my surprise on hearing Elizabeth speak thus. I was not so much amazed at Miss Dunn's ambition as at the evident irritation Elizabeth felt on the subject. She was indignant, and did not care to hide it.

"That is why I stay here," she resumed, "even after what has passed this morning."

She knit her brows, as if vainly seeking some issue to this trouble; while I stood before her, asking myself if I were dreaming or not. A knock at the door here disturbed us both. It was only a servant with a message. Mr. Herbert was below, and asked to speak to Mrs. Henry de Lusignan. We exchanged looks.

"Very well," answered Elizabeth; and the

girl closed the door and vanished. "Go down to him, Bessie," said Elizabeth. "I have nothing to hear and nothing to say. You may tell him what you like," she added, a little impatiently, "any thing, every thing—there, go like a good girl." And as I stood irresolute, she gently took me to the door and put me out.

I went down the stairs as slowly as if the delay of every step were a gain to me. I was not thinking of what I could tell Mr. Herbert, but of what he had said to me that morning, when I entered the drawing-room, where he stood waiting for me with the flowers which had fallen from the hand of Elizabeth, like the beauty and honor of her life, lying withered and unseen at his feet. A solitary wax-light burned on the table, and lit his handsome face, now unusually grave, but it cleared on seeing me.

"Ah! how good you are!" he said; "how very good to come!"

"Elizabeth sent me," I replied; "she cannot come herself."

"That is to say, she will not—then it is all over."

"But you had better know what has happened," I said, getting frightened. "Mr. de Lusignan taxes her with not being his son's widow, and—and I believe she is going to marry Mr. Gray."

Mr. Herbert did not look moved, he did not even look surprised at hearing this. All he said was: "No, she will never marry him. Poor Elizabeth!"

His voice was full of pity—of pity, and nothing more; but I felt such perplexity, such anguish, so great a fear of coming calamity, that I clasped and wrung my hands in a sort of despair. Mr. Herbert came up to me at once.

"Do not," he entreated; "do not—all may end better than you think. Only let her come to me at once, before I speak to Mr. de Lusignan and Mademoiselle Aubrey."

I did not answer him; I turned to the door, and leaving the room I ran up-stairs eagerly, but as I ran I thought: "I wonder if he cares about her marrying Mr. Gray?" I had no time to linger over the thought, for at the head of the stairs I met her leaving Harry's room, and coming back to her own with a light in her hand.

"O Elizabeth," I said, hurriedly, "you must go down to Mr. Herbert—indeed you must. He has something to tell you—at once."

"What can he tell me that I shall care to hear?" she answered; "let him only tell me that he will be a kind step-father to Harry. I want no more from him."

A thunder-bolt falling at my feet would not have startled me more fearfully than these words. I suppose I looked very guilty, for Elizabeth, giving me a sharp look, said :

"You have something to tell me?"

"Yes," I faltered.

"Tell me nothing here," she resumed; and she opened my room-door, and made a sign which I obeyed, that I should go in and pass by her.

"Well," she said, as she closed the door. I would have given worlds to be silent. I could not let her go down to Mr. Herbert with that strange error in her mind. Shrinking like a guilty thing, I faltered :

"Mr. Herbert wants to marry me."

There was a moment's pause; then Elizabeth said, dryly :

"Indeed! Well," she added, after a pause that seemed eternal to me, "what do you say to that? Yes, of course?"

"Elizabeth, you shall not wrong me!" I cried; "I refused him."

"Have him, if you like him, Bessie," she said. "Mr. Gray will do as well for me. And since I must be the most wretched of women, what need I care in whose company I am so?"

I looked at her; the light which she still held showed me a face in which misery was written.

"But why must you be wretched?" I asked; "do hear what Mr. Herbert—"

She interrupted me with a look.

"I want to hear nothing," she said; "and as to my being wretched—never mind me—be happy if you can, Bessie. You do not like Mr. Herbert yet, I dare say, but you will in time, and Gray's House is a lovely place."

Her words were torture to me. I could not bear them.

"Elizabeth, have pity on me!" I exclaimed. "I meant no harm; but—but I am afraid that James was right, and that I liked him all along, only I did not know it. No, believe me, not even this morning did I know it."

She looked at me in a sort of wonder.

"To like, and not know it! You must be wonderfully innocent, Bessie! The moment I liked I knew it. The very first second I saw him I thought, 'Oh! how happy she will be, the girl whom he marries;' and, in that same moment, he thought, as he told me later, 'That woman is the one—that one, and no other!'"

Her voice was even and low, but passion burned in her blue eyes, passion of which the very remembrance was more than any reality life could still offer. Truly, as I heard her, I under-

stood that Mr. Herbert or Mr. Gray made little difference to her. To be wretched with the one, or wretched with the other, could not matter much to one whose heart was in a grave.

"Well, Bessie, you are true, at least," she said, holding out her hand, and taking mine, "for you need not have told me that. God bless you, and make you very happy; and do not trouble about me. Mr. Gray will do very well!" she added, with a dreary smile.

"Elizabeth, do not do that without having at least heard Mr. Herbert. Believe me, he has something to tell you at once, Elizabeth."

I would have said more, but the cold silence with which she heard me made the words falter on my lips.

"I *must* marry," she said. "The sooner it is over the better. Mr. Gray would not take my nay this morning, he shall have my ay to-morrow; and, as to Mr. Herbert, he has nothing to say which I do not know beforehand; and if you will see him again for me, Bessie, you may tell him so. You may also tell him that life is over for me—over forever. Good-by; God bless you!"

She turned away like one who wanted no answer, and I gave her none. She took her light with her, and I stood, as she had left me, in my dark room, with the stars in the sky looking at me through the open window. The last words of Elizabeth rang in my ears like a knell. That life which was only beginning for me was over for her, and she told me, over forever—awful doom for one so young! What need I, then, go down again to Mr. Herbert and tell him, "You were right, I have failed; she will hear—she will know nothing?" And yet, after a while, I went.

My heart beat as I reached the drawing-room door. If I could only tell him what I had to say, "Give up the hope of seeing Elizabeth," and then vanish. If I only could! To like a presence is not always to seek it willingly; and there is a liking which, in a girl's heart, goes hand-in-hand with fear. This was not the fear which I had felt of James Carr, poor fellow! who was always scolding and reproaching me—a strange way of love-making!—but another fear, all shyness, all shrinking, which would have liked to possess the divine privilege of spirits, and, seeing, not be seen. At length I opened the door, and entered the room with an abruptness which was only meant to hide cowardice.

But there was no need for maiden shyness now. The hour of grace had passed for Elizabeth; and Mr. Herbert was no longer alone. He sat facing me, talking to Mr. de Lusignan and mademoiselle, and it needed only a look at these

two to understand that he was telling no common story. Mademoiselle leaned back in her chair, and her face was bathed in tears; my guardian stood by the mantel-piece, his elbows leaning upon it, and his dark face, on which appeared the deepest emotion, turned and bent toward Mr. Herbert. I believe they all saw me, but none of them stirred. Mr. Herbert went on speaking. I sat down on a chair by the door, and listened to him.

"I wish I could have told you this less abruptly; but remember that I was pledged to secrecy, and only released an hour ago."

"And he is alive? Oh! is it possible? After all that grief, after all that misery, alive and coming!"

It was mademoiselle who spoke. A wild thought crossed my brain. Had her dead Harry been only lost?—was he found again? And, wild as the thought seemed, it was the merest truth, which Mr. Herbert's further words confirmed.

"I dare say," he continued, "you remember that paragraph which appeared in the *Times* last year, while we were all in Fontainebleau? It was taken from a Melbourne paper, and said plainly that Henry de Lusignan, the explorer, had not been murdered by the natives, but only taken into remote captivity; that he was now free, and had been met and recognized by some travellers on his way to Sydney. I confess I put little faith in this story, but Harry de Lusignan had been my dear friend, and, on reading this, I went to London to see a man named Carter, of whom you have both heard."

"Yes," said Mr. de Lusignan, "he was the great man of the O'Donnell expedition, the only survivor, I believe, and he is dead now."

"Yes," continued Mr. Herbert, "he is dead; but when I applied to him I found him living in Belgravia, on the handsome annuity which a public subscription had purchased for him, as the tribute due to his indomitable perseverance in the cause of science. I knew that Carter had not merely brought home most valuable notes and information—he was a member of almost every learned society in Europe—but that he was still in constant, in almost daily intercourse with Australia. If any one could give me certain news, he was the man. He laughed the paragraph from the Australian paper to scorn. 'I did not merely see Lusignan fall by my side,' he said, 'but I buried him before I left the spot where he fell.' There was no answering this. I read, a few days later, a letter from Carter to the same purport, which appeared in the *Times*, and there the matter ended. A month later I went to Australia to recover some

long-lost money, which I sadly needed then. I thought to remain months away—the news of my unexpected good-fortune came and changed all my plans. I was on the eve of departure, when, one evening, in a remote part of the town, and in a lonely street, I found myself face to face with Harry de Lusignan. I believe that if he could have denied his identity to me he would, but, altered though he was, he could not, and, indeed, did not attempt it; and now I will tell you word for word what passed between us. It was not much, but it was significant.

"Good Heavens! Harry," I said, laying my two hands on his shoulders, 'is it you, after all?'

"I suppose so," he answered, quietly, 'only do not tell the world about it, like a good fellow. I want to be dead a while longer.'

"But Carter knew you were living—when he told me that he had actually buried you!"

"Carter knew that I had detected him reading my private letters; that we had had a quarrel, and that he had stabbed me; robbed me of all my notes and papers, and left me dying of loss of blood in the sun," was his answer.

"I was astounded at so awful and so direct an accusation.

"And it is because I bide my time," he continued, 'that I wish to be dead a while longer. I shall soon go to England, and Carter will hear from me there. So now give me your word not to open your lips about having seen me till I authorize you to do so.'

"He was peremptory, and I had no alternative but to comply. He seemed satisfied when he had my pledge; he shook me warmly by the hand, promised to let me hear from him, and without giving me time to add a word, or put a question, he left me. From that day to this I have not seen him."

"But you have heard from him!" cried mademoiselle, sitting straight up with sudden terror on her pale face; "you told us so!"

"I heard from him an hour ago, but not once during all these months. When I came back to England I made a few quiet inquiries about Carter. He was still living in Belgravia, he was still enjoying his annuity, still a member of learned societies, and, above all, he was still the great Australian explorer; but of the man whom he had so basely robbed and murdered I could hear nothing. I had no right to stir, but Heaven alone knows how hard I found it to keep my word; how often I asked myself, if Harry de Lusignan had not become the victim of a second crime committed, in order to conceal the first. The thought took a powerful hold of me, and

perplexed me strangely, till the death of Carter, which we all read in the papers some time ago, set some of my doubts at rest. Whatever had happened, it was useless now for me to speak; but I could act, and I confess that I did so. I made inquiries, the result of which was very conflicting: from some reports it seemed all but certain that Henry de Lusignan had perished in the great wreck of the Sylph, on her way home to England; and from others, on the contrary, it seemed clear that he was alive and well in Melbourne. This letter proves that both accounts were equally false. Will you read it?"

He handed an open letter to mademoiselle, but though she stretched out her hand, it shook so that she could not hold the paper. Mr. de Lusignan took it from her and read aloud:

"MY DEAR HERBERT: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,' and so I have found it. When I came to England, fully armed against my enemy as I thought, I was struck down with illness before I could raise a finger against him. For weeks and months I remained between life and death, powerless to punish my murderer, and powerless to seek those whom I loved. When I at last recovered, I learned the death of Carter, also that you had become owner of Gray's House in —shire, and that my uncle and my dearest friend were on a visit in your neighborhood. I dare say you will take me in for a day or two, and break the news of my resurrection to them. I leave London to-morrow by the 7 P.M. train, which is due at 10 at Hanvil Station—"

Here mademoiselle started up with a wild look. "He is coming!" she cried, staring round the room, "coming here—to-night—!"

She said no more, but sank back in her chair like one bereft of life.

I started up and ran to her.

"O Mr. Herbert, open the window!" I cried; and looking round at him, I saw the pale face of Elizabeth, who stood behind his chair as pale, as still, as white as a statue. I do not know how long she had been there, nor how she had come in unseen and unheard among us. It cannot have been by the door near which I was sitting, I think it must have been through the terrace and the folding-window, for it was there I found her little cambric handkerchief torn to shreds, half an hour later. What followed was all confusion. Mademoiselle had fainted, and, as I attempted to restore her, Elizabeth came up and quietly put me by. Then Miss Dunn came in, and was all questioning, and all amazement; and at length mademoiselle was restored to consciousness, and taken up to her room, to which

Elizabeth accompanied her. I wanted to go up with them, but my guardian bade me stay below.

"All she wants is quietness," he said, and I believe he said it to keep away Miss Dunn.

"It is half-past nine," he added, looking at his watch; "shall we go to the station?"

"Willingly," answered Mr. Herbert.

They went, and left me with Miss Dunn.

"I never heard any thing like it!" exclaimed Miss Dunn, clasping her hands. "Talking of absurdity and romance, and all that—why, they are nothing to that, are they, now? And that Mr. Henry de Lusignan not to be dead, after all these years! I remember him so well—such a handsome man!"

"You knew him!" I exclaimed, surprised and startled; for that was Miss Dunn's way, to bring out pieces of unexpected information, just as a thief brings out a pistol.

"He came several times to Miss Russell's," she answered, coolly—"she is such an amateur of all clever people, you know. She asked him to one of her *conversazioni*. Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, then Miss Clare, was present. They were both so handsome, I thought; but of course she was handsomer as a woman than he as a man. Poor lady! it is hard that it should not be her husband coming to life again. I wonder if he is married—but I fancy not. I think all the members of that expedition took some oath, or some pledge, or some vow, not to marry. Did you not understand something of the kind, Miss Carr?"

I feigned deafness. I was no match for Miss Dunn with her news and her questions. I felt that Elizabeth stood on the edge of a precipice, and I vowed in my heart that, whatever her sin might be, no hand of mine should push her in. So, instead of answering Miss Dunn, I rose, and went and picked up Elizabeth's little white handkerchief, which I saw lying on the floor near the folding-window.

"What is it?" asked Miss Dunn, with sudden quickness—"a letter? I saw a letter when I came in."

I answered that it was a handkerchief; and, putting it in my pocket, I declared my intention of going up to see how mademoiselle was getting on. Miss Dunn, too, would go up-stairs; poor dear Miss Russell would be so glad to hear all this. Mr. Henry de Lusignan had always been such a favorite of hers. I believe Miss Dunn also wanted to have a peep at mademoiselle, for she stopped with me at her door; but, if such was her wish, it was not gratified. It was Elizabeth who opened the door, and stood on the

threshold, calm, though pale, but by no means inviting our entrance.

"Mademoiselle Aubrey is better," she said; "but requires to be quiet a little while longer."

"Ah! poor dear!" exclaimed Miss Dunn, "I dare say she does." And she went on to Miss Russell's room. I stood, half expecting to be called in by mademoiselle's voice, but I was not; so, merely putting Elizabeth's handkerchief in her hand, I turned away without saying a word.

CHAPTER XLII.

My room was dark, but through the open window I saw a pale, starry sky. I went and leaned out. I felt in a fever, and the fresh night air tempted me. I tried to think, but thought only frightened me. Grief and humiliation, if not for me, at least for one whom I loved, stood on either side of the only path open to her steps. Self-will had dug beneath her feet a pit in which she must now fall, and who could help her? "Poor Elizabeth!" Mr. Herbert had said. Ay, poor Elizabeth indeed, if half of what I feared were true! Her fate, such as it was, was on its road—it was coming fast; and, with a beating heart, I listened to the sounds of the night. Some distant clock struck ten; then there was a long pause; then a dog barked incessantly for ten minutes; then another silence followed, and at length I heard steps and voices coming up the road that led to Hanvil house. "This way, Harry," said my guardian; a door clanged, and then all was still.

Then it was true, no false story, but an actual fact, the long-lost nephew, mademoiselle's Harry, was below. I did not stir; I did not feel that I was wanted in that family meeting. I remained where I was, looking at the night. It was calm again. The clock had no hour to tell, the dog had fallen asleep, the stars shone with that unchanging brightness of theirs which seems so cold to the impassioned heart of man.

"Come weal, come woe, what is it to me?" each star seemed to say from its place in the sky; "I am bright, and I am eternal. Why should I vex myself with what goes on below?"

The sound of my door opening behind me, and a light which suddenly filled my room, made me turn round. It was Elizabeth. "I suppose I looked startled, for she said, softly:

"Do not be afraid, Bessie, it is I."

I went up to her; but she pointed to the window. I turned back and closed it, then came

again to her. She put down the light which she held, and looked at me very earnestly.

"Bessie," she said, in a low tone, "you love me, I know you love me. Will you save me?—you can."

I did not ask her how I could save her. I flung my arms around her neck, and all the love in my heart arose to my lips.

"Any thing, Elizabeth, any thing!" I said; "I will do any thing for you."

"God bless you, my darling! Well, then, sit down and hear me."

She still held my hand, and, making me sit down on the edge of my bed, she sat down by me.

"You know what Mr. de Lusignan taxed me with this morning," she said. "Well, then, Bessie, it is true; I am not his son's widow; but the guilt of the deceit be on the head of him who forced his name and his money upon me! I cannot undo what he has done without betraying my secret, and wild-horses will not make me do that!" she added, with a short laugh. "That secret, Bessie, only one human being can betray, and he is now below."

"Mr. de Lusignan's nephew," I said, looking at her—"have you seen him?"

"No," she answered, quietly, "I have not; but I listened at the head of the stairs, and I heard his voice in the hall ten minutes ago. I have the sort of memory which never forgets a voice, so I knew his at once. It is he, Bessie—as sure as you and I are sitting here, it is he."

I looked at her again; for as I sat thus by her side, I felt her shivering in every limb, but her self-command and her self-control were not gone.

"Mr. de Lusignan has just sent for me," she resumed. "I know his purpose, and I will defeat it, no matter at what cost, no matter how. He shall not conquer me—I say he shall not! And now, Bessie, what I want of you is this: go down, see this nephew of his, and give him this."—She put a slip of paper in my hand as she spoke.—"He must get this to-night," she continued, "for I can guess what has passed, and what trap is lying open for me. Miss Russell has beyond doubt asked this nephew of Mr. de Lusignan to stay here for a day or so. Depend upon it, Bessie, he is to sleep here to-night; and, though I have sent word that I am too unwell to go down, I shall have to meet him to-morrow, do what I can to avoid it; and that is why I want you, my darling, to give him these few lines to-night—now—actually now. You can read them," she added, calmly, and mechanically I cast my eyes upon the paper and read:

"I was Mrs. Smith when we met last; now I am here with my child as Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, your cousin's widow. Keep my secret for me, and nothing—nothing in this world shall make me betray it."

"And now you know how my fate lies in your hands," she continued. "That man has my secret; he may not know that it is so, but he has; and, Bessie, I know enough of him to say that, unless taken by surprise, he will never betray me."

I looked at her very sadly.

"So you are not Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, after all?" I exclaimed, with involuntary regret and reproach. "O Elizabeth, will you not trust me? Who are you?"

She turned her head away.

"Bessie," she said, in a low tone, "the hardest sting in my lot has been deceiving you; I was driven to it—but oh! how often I longed to open my heart to you, and I could not—I could not! I cannot even now."

"Never mind who you are?" I cried, with sudden emotion. "Whoever you may be, Elizabeth, I love you—I love you!"

"And you will do what I ask you to do?" she said, smiling down in my face.

"Yes," I answered, smiling too, "I will do it."

"To-night?" she said, coaxingly.

"Perhaps I cannot do it to-night, Elizabeth," I replied, hesitatingly.

"Then you will get up with dawn to-morrow—I shall waken you, if need be—and watch and give him that paper before I come down. I shall be ill, and come down late; but, Bessie, you must try to do it now—you must indeed."

"But how so, Elizabeth?" was the only objection I ventured to make. I was wholly under her control, as ductile an instrument in her hands as she could wish me to be. "What shall I say if I go down now?" I asked, hesitatingly.

"I have thought of that," she answered, coolly—she had thought of every thing, as I found later, during the ten minutes that had passed since the arrival of Mr. de Lusignan's nephew. "I have left my smelling-bottle below—I was using it for mademoiselle, you know—and you can go and look for it, and if you say, Bessie, that I am ill, and require it, you will say the truth, and nothing but the truth."

"But when I have found it I must come up again," I argued, "and that may be immediately."

"You may not find it at once," she replied, in a tranquil tone; "besides, I dare say he will

help you; he will move at least—well, then, you can manage to be near him, and to slip the paper into his hands."

I was as frightened at this suggestion as if the purport of her words had not reached me before.

"O Elizabeth!" I said, shrinking back terrified; "how can I do that?"

"If I could do it myself would I ask you?" she replied.

I remembered how she had watched by my sick-bed, and I felt passive in her hands; but surely her case must have been a desperate one indeed when she had to take such a step as this, and to rely on so poor an instrument as myself! I made no further remonstrance; I thrust the paper she had given me into my pocket, and, rising, I went to the door. Elizabeth followed me, and, when we stood together on the threshold she pushed me back a little, and looked deep into my eyes.

"Bessie," she said, in a low tone, "remember that this is life and death to me!"

"I shall remember it," I said, and I went down.

Once I was out of Elizabeth's sight, all the bravery I had felt to accomplish her errand—me, and terror took possession absolute of my whole being. How could I enter unbidden that room where my guardian and his long-lost nephew, where mademoiselle and her darling were meeting again, after the cold hand of Death himself had seemed to part them? How could I face a man who was a stranger to me, and put a written paper by stealth into his hand? It was impossible! I must go and tell Elizabeth that it was impossible. I turned back, and went up several steps: then I paused, for her last words rang in my heart: "Remember that this is life and death to me!"

Come what would, I must do her errand. I must at least attempt it. Abruptly, with a sort of despair, I opened the door of the drawing-room, where several voices were talking loud, and entered without knocking. My guardian, who stood with his back to me, turned round sharply, and a stranger—thin, pale, and worn, but with a broad brow, and the handsomest of dark eyes—looked at me from the depths of an arm-chair. By him sat mademoiselle, and their hands were clasped; Miss Dunn, and Miss Russell, who had miraculously recovered from her headache, were also present; but my heart fell when I saw that Mr Herbert, on whom I had vaguely relied, was not there.

Mr. de Lusignan's face darkened so visibly on

seeing me that I stood still at the door, frightened out of all presence of mind.

"Well, Bessie?" he said.

"Elizabeth has left her smelling-bottle here," I faltered, "and she is quite unwell, and sent me for it."

"I saw it in her hand when she went up," he said, shortly.

He was so evidently annoyed that I saw the stranger give him a look of slight surprise, which from him came to me, resting upon me with not unkind scrutiny. I could not myself help looking at this long-lost Harry with some emotion. He was, as I have said, a sallow, slender man, worn and thin, but with all the fire of youth in his eyes.

"May I not look for it?" I asked, scarcely knowing what I said.

"I saw it in her hand when she went up with Mademoiselle Aubrey," answered my guardian; "but you may look for it, of course."

He came up to my side and stood by me while I looked on the table. Elizabeth's slip of paper was in my left hand; with my right I moved the books, albums, and photographs. My errand was a hopeless one, and I knew it, but my mind was so absorbed with it that the discourse around me only reached me in confused fragments. "Blue Mountains," "Lake Torrens," and "Natives," from the traveller; and the remark, more characteristic than elegant, "What a set of villains!" periodically uttered by Miss Russell, struck me most. I also gathered that Elizabeth's surmise was correct—Miss Russell had pressed her hospitality on the stranger, who had accepted it.

"Well, Bessie," said my guardian, "do you think Elizabeth left her smelling-bottle here?"

I replied in a low tone that I supposed not, and was turning to the door, when mademoiselle called me back.

"Mignonne," she said, drawing me to her side, "this is my Harry.—I have not had time yet to talk to you about Mignonne," she added, turning to him, "but if you do not know her, she knows you well, Harry."

He smiled, and the smile, though brief, lit his worn face with strange beauty. Oh, if I could have seen him alone and said a few words to him! How sure I felt that Elizabeth, whoever she might be, would get mercy from him, and be safe in his hands! But as I stood before him, with every eye bent upon us, I was helpless and powerless, and could only listen to mademoiselle, and, when she had done speaking, say that I must go back to Elizabeth, and leave the room

with my errand unfulfilled. Elizabeth was waiting for me in my room, still sitting on the edge of my bed as I had left her.

"You have failed," she said. "I knew you would; but it was a desperate case, and now what shall I do?"

She buried her face in her hands. I thought she was crying, but when she looked up again there was the brightest smile on her face.

"Come, Bessie, which is the better course," she said—"to go away by the earliest train, or to keep my room with a bad attack of neuralgia? I know he will not stay long here, and when he is gone I can defy Mr. de Lusignan."

I was no adept in the art of deceit, and I could not advise Elizabeth. I believe she never even thought of my scruples. Heart, soul, mind, and every faculty, were bent on escaping the present danger. She would have gone through fire and water, she would have risked her immortal soul ten times over, rather than be defeated.

"Elizabeth," I suggested, "why not try to see that Mr. Henry de Lusignan? Since he stays here he may not be so difficult—"

"Difficult!" she interrupted with a bitter laugh, "take my word for it, Bessie, I shall have every opportunity to do so that Mr. de Lusignan can devise; but do you think I will give him that opportunity of shaming me which he longs for? No—he has forced this war upon me, and, I say it again, I will fight bravely to the last! And now," she added after a while, "I can tell you what you are to do for me, Bessie. It will be very easy this time. Put the paper you have brought back inside an envelop, direct it to Mr. Henry de Lusignan, and take it early to-morrow morning to the post-office. It will be delivered to him in the course of the day, and then," she added with a sigh of relief, "all will be well."

"Elizabeth, if you were to ask Mr. Herbert," I began, hesitatingly.

She rose and looked at me with flashing eyes.

"Do you not see that I would not trust even you if I could help it!" she exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed passion, "and you want me to bring Mr. Herbert into my council! Why not Miss Russell or Miss Dunn? I assure you I care as much about them as I do about Mr. Herbert."

"And yet you would have married him!" I said, in a low tone.

She turned dreadfully pale, and walked to the door; I ran after her.

"Elizabeth, I meant no harm," I said, anx-

lously; "do not mind what I said, but indeed you are wrong to treat Mr. Herbert so. He is your true friend—he is, indeed!"

"I suppose so," she answered, in a tone of supreme indifference; "but all this is mere waste of time. Will you do what I ask you to do, Bessie?"

"You know I will, Elizabeth," I said, eagerly, glad that her anger should be over.

"Well, then, do it at once," she said, impatiently.

It was soon done. Elizabeth put the paper she had written into an envelop, which I directed and placed on my table ready for the morning; and Elizabeth, giving it a grave, attentive look, thanked me coldly, and, bidding me a good-night, left me.

Did I sleep that night? It seems to me that I did not, and that its hours were spent in one feverish dream. I was always climbing one of the steep rocks in Fontainebleau, and, just when I reached its summit breathless and weary, finding myself below again. Then I would waken disappointed and unrefreshed, to fall asleep once more, and climb that hopeless rock anew. At length the real morning came, the real hour for rising and doing the errand of Elizabeth.

She did not come near me, as I had hoped she would, if it were only to urge me on, as the spur may urge the failing steed. She left me to myself and to my own ingenuity, in order to accomplish the task she had laid upon me.

I had but one fear, because there was in truth but one danger, that of being met on my way to or from the post-office; but Fortune favored me so far. I got out of the house unperceived. I did not meet a soul either on my way to Hanvil or on my return, and it was only as I was coming back through the garden, that I was suddenly confronted by my guardian and his nephew.

"You are out early, Miss Carr," said Mr. de Lusignan, with cold politeness.

I stammered that the garden was so pleasant in the morning.

"Oh! delightful!" he answered, ironically; "do you know how Elizabeth is this morning?" he added, abruptly.

Truly thankful was I to be able to answer that I had not seen her, and did not know.

"Ah, to be sure!" said Mr. de Lusignan, kicking a pebble with his foot, and smiling as he looked at the ground—"to be sure."

And they went on.

I stole up to the room of Elizabeth, and knocked at her door like a guilty thing.

"Come in," said her voice.

I found her standing in the middle of the floor, pale and breathless, like one waiting her doom.

"The letter is gone," I said.

She breathed a deep sigh of relief, and sat down.

"He will get it to-day," she said, "and until he gets it I remain in my room, very poorly with neuralgia—don't I, Bessie?"

I did not answer.

"Don't have any scruples," she said, with a curl of her lip. "I shall do it all myself. Perhaps you had better leave me," she added, a little impatiently; "people who have got neuralgia don't talk much, do they?"

Thus dismissed, I turned to the door. I had not reached it, when Elizabeth was behind me, with her two arms around my neck, and her cheek laid to mine.

"God bless you!" she said, softly, "and don't mind my horrid temper. I can't help it, Bessie, I can't; the strain is too great—the trial is too hard!"

And laying her head on my shoulder, she sobbed there as if her heart would break.

How could I be vexed with her?—how could I even blame her? I could only love and pity, and feel the deepest tenderness for one so sorely tried. But she had asked me to leave her, and I felt it was well that I should do so. I also felt relieved when her door closed on me, for Elizabeth lived in an atmosphere of untruth and mystery, which oppressed me strangely. I could pity, I could forgive, and I could love—but do what I would, I could not but blame in my heart. Elizabeth did not appear at the breakfast-table. Her neuralgia was so severe that she actually sent for a physician, who prescribed absolute repose. This bulletin came as we were all sitting down to breakfast.

"Very unfortunate," dryly said Mr. de Lusignan; "you must stay until Elizabeth is well, Harry. You have seen the boy. He is like his poor father—is he not?"

"I think he is more like you," replied his nephew.

"You must see his mother, too," resumed my guardian. "She is a lovely woman—is she not, Miss Russell?"

"Oh, very!" answered Miss Russell.—"Do tell me about these savages again, Mr. Harry—I must call you Mr. Harry, you know."

"But Mr. Henry de Lusignan has seen his cousin's widow!" began Miss Dunn, in tones of silver.

My heart nearly failed me—Elizabeth's secret

was lost—irrevocably lost! but rescue came under the aspect of Miss Russell.

"Oh! never mind," she said, impatiently. "I want to hear about the savages."

"Where did Harry see her?" sharply asked my guardian, turning on Miss Dunn, while his nephew looked suddenly interested, and also much surprised.

"And I say I want to hear about the savages!" exclaimed Miss Russell, giving Miss Dunn an irate look, and tapping her saucer with her silver spoon. "I wish you would not imagine or invent such absurdities, Dunn!"

I had often admired the empire which Miss Dunn exercised over her capricious mistress, but it was a suggestive empire rather than an empire absolute. To my surprise, she now unsaid her own words with perfect readiness.

"Ah, to be sure," she said, "what a mistake! I was thinking of Mr. Reed."

"Of course you were," pettishly said Miss Russell, who had not put by her headache and come down to breakfast in order to hear family matters discussed. "And now do let me hear about these savages," she added, with an imploring, pathetic tone. "I adore savages—Fenimore Cooper's are such dears—are they not, Mademoiselle Aubrey?"

Mademoiselle's voice shook a little as she answered:

"Miss Russell, will you kindly wait to hear Harry's adventures until I can leave the room? I feel I cannot bear to hear of his sufferings yet. I know it is very weak of me, but I cannot help it—indeed I cannot!"

"But since he is alive and well?" urged Miss Russell, who looked very blank.

Harry de Lusignan, without giving mademoiselle time to reply, said quietly:

"I am afraid I cannot gratify you this morning, Miss Russell. My story is a long one, and I must leave you this afternoon; and there are, besides, circumstances connected with my captivity into which I cannot yet enter very fully." Miss Russell looked remarkably cross on hearing this, and took her breakfast in sulky silence. The meal indeed was a silent one, and we all dispersed when it was over. Miss Russell was wheeled to the Chinese pavilion, where she was attended by Miss Dunn. My guardian and his nephew walked up and down the terrace, talking earnestly, and mademoiselle sat down in a chair by the window, feasting her eyes with the sight of her Harry.

I suppose hers was pure, perfect happiness, for, though unconscious tears filled her eyes, she

smiled all the time as her hand brushed them away. I thought she was not aware of my presence, but she was, for without turning round or averting her happy eyes, she said to me:

"Mignonne, I now understand the meaning of Simon's 'Nunc dimittis.' It is happiness to go when a great joy has come, for after that can only come sorrow. The aged prophet was glad because he had beheld the salvation of Israel, but he did not ask to see the Passion and the Cross, that were to be its fulfilment. So do I feel. This joy is enough for me; I dare not ask for more, lest gladness should close in sorrow."

She bowed her head, and the tears fell over her clasped hands. I went up to her and clasped my hands around her neck, and, without looking at her, I whispered:

"Dear mademoiselle, you will never be angry with me, will you?"

She seemed to know what I meant, for, without questioning me, she replied, quietly:

"No, Mignonne, it was too hard a trial for you."

She did not, could not know how hard it was! My guardian and his nephew were still walking up and down the terrace; just as they reached the window in which we sat, a servant came up to them, handed three letters on a plate to my guardian, and gave his nephew—none. My heart gave a great leap in my bosom. I was in agonies! My letter, Elizabeth's fate, lay in the hands of her enemy! How had we not thought that similarity of name might lead to so easy a mistake? My guardian put down two of the letters on a vase of scarlet geraniums by him, broke the seal of the one he held, and read it slowly. His nephew, to leave him freer, walked down the terrace; and mademoiselle, leaving me, went out and joined him. I took up a newspaper and pretended to read the advertisements, but all the time I was looking furtively at Mr. de Lusignan. The letter he was reading was too long a one to be mine; but when he had finished it and put it into his pocket, and took up the second letter, my heart sank again, and I had a mind to run away. I did not—one never does, there is ever something that tempts one on to one's fate, just as the precipice tempts the wretch half-hanging over it. The second letter was soon read, and the third taken up; this, then, was mine. Mr. de Lusignan looked at it, then, raising his voice, said quietly:

"This is for you, Harry."

His nephew turned round, and seeing the letter in his uncle's outstretched hand, came and took it with a surprised air; then, to my infinite

relief, put it into his pocket and turned back to mademoiselle, with whom he soon walked down a garden-path. I had forgotten my guardian in looking at them, but as they vanished, and I turned back, I found him looking steadily at me. I returned the look with a sort of fascination; and, beckoning to me, Mr. de Lusignan signed me to go out and join him. I obeyed, more dead than alive.

"Come with me," he said.

He took me no farther than the first flower-bed, but far enough for us to be out of ear-shot. When we had reached it, he stood still and said, coldly:

"You have done a wrong thing, Miss Carr, but you may tell your friend that it is a useless thing. She will never make my nephew her accomplice." With these words he left me.

I stood for a while like one rooted to the spot, then I walked on straight before me, feeling that I could not meet Elizabeth. I had not walked ten minutes before I found myself close to the Chinese pavilion, where Miss Dunn sat reading the paper to Miss Russell. By what magic did Miss Dunn already know that the traveller had received a letter, and why did she choose me as the very person to whom she felt bound to express her wonder on that subject? "So odd that any one should know Mr. Henry de Lusignan was here, you know! For it came by post." Luckily, Miss Russell was in the mood for contradiction, for with a very sharp "Nonsense! it came from Mr. Herbert, of course," she attempted to dismiss the subject.

But Miss Dunn was pertinacious: "I thought, you know, that Mr. Herbert would have sent a servant round with a note, and would never have sent it by post, you know."

My agonies increased with every word she uttered, for oh! how had we never thought of these plain objections! But again, to my infinite relief, Miss Russell declared that Mr. Herbert would never send a note by a servant, who would be sure to get tipsy; and that he would, on the contrary, have it posted, as the post was the only safe and rational means of conveying letters. Miss Dunn did not look beaten, and I hurried away before she had found out any new fact or argument wherewith to worry me. Less than ever could I face Elizabeth; indeed, I wanted to face no one, and went to the orchard for solitude.

It was very quiet and very lonely. I went to a remote spot, where low apple-trees shed a cool, green shade on the high grass, and I sat down there, feeling oppressed with fear and care. The keeping of this secret of Elizabeth's was too

much for me. I was not trusted, and yet I felt both miserable and guilty. Oh! if I could only lay my weary burden on Mr. Herbert, and put it by for a while! If I could only go to him in my trouble and tell him: "Carry this for me—it is too heavy, and I cannot bear it. Do it, for you are strong, and I am weak."

For he was strong, I saw it now, stronger than I had imagined. He had guessed the secret of Elizabeth in Fontainebleau, and mastered his love on the knowledge with strange power in a man so young. He had felt that she should not be his, and had turned his heart away from her with inexorable firmness. They had met again, and passion had not resumed her empire, for hers had been the true death, and not the lull which leads to the saddest falls, as resting on the deepest error.

And so my thoughts wandered away, and were leading me very far indeed, far from Elizabeth and her troubles, when the sound of a step aroused me. I looked up, and saw Henry de Lusignan coming up the path, and walking slowly in its checkered shade and sunshine. He was alone; he was smoking a cigar, and he held my letter in his hand. Again he looked at it curiously; then he sat down on a bench beneath a tall pear-tree, tore the envelop open, let it fall carelessly to the ground, and read the slip of paper I had placed within it.

I held my breath. I was all eyes, all vision, and all sense, to read the meaning of his face. It told me nothing. He was unconscious of my presence, yet not one of the muscles of his countenance moved, his lids did not quiver, his color did not come or go, but he sat there gazing straight before him. After a while he rose, picked up the envelop without looking at it, then walked away. He paused not far from the spot where I still sat, but he never saw me.

CHAPTER XLIII.

INEXPRESSIBLE relief invaded my whole being. Elizabeth was safe at last. I could not doubt it. I had seen it with my own eyes. Harry de Lusignan had read those few lines, which were to save her from cruel humiliation. I must go and tell her. I ran away light of foot and light of heart, and only slackened my speed when I reached the house, but I met none of the faces I feared to encounter. My guardian, mademoiselle, Miss Dunn, were invisible. My only perplexity now was what I should say, or how much I

should say, to Elizabeth. I entered my room to solve the question, and found a letter lying on the table. It was only an envelop, inside of which Elizabeth had written: "Come to me, I can bear this no longer! Come in without knocking."

I went at once. I found Elizabeth lying dressed on her bed, in a darkened room. She did not stir when I came in, and it was only when closing the door I said, "It is I, Elizabeth," that she sat up, and, uncovering her face, exclaimed in a low tone:

"Well!"

Never shall I forget her aspect! The darkened room and the crimson curtains may have added to the pallor of her countenance, but they cannot have given it that look of breathless pain, which scarcely passed away when I answered, "It is all right; he has read it."

"He has read it," she repeated mechanically; and, sinking back on her pillow, she turned her face to the wall.

I stood at the foot of her bed, silent and perplexed. Should I tell her more than this, though she did not question? While I was deliberating, Fate decided the matter, under the aspect of Miss Dunn, who entered the room.

She cannot have knocked, or, standing still as I was, I must have heard her; yet, with her imperturbable coolness, she said:

"I scarcely dared to come in, yet being authorized by you, Miss Carr, I thought I might venture."

Elizabeth never moved, but I turned round and looked at Miss Dunn with a skepticism I did not attempt to disguise.

"You are mistaken," I said, coldly. "I did not know you were coming in."

"Oh! indeed. I am so sorry. Well, I am not going to worry poor Mrs. Henry, you know she seems so poorly. I came up to tell you, Miss Carr, that Mr. de Lusignan wants you. His nephew is going away at once, and not finding you in your room I came here. I thought his cousin's widow might like to see him before he left, you know."

"Are you sure he is going away, Miss Dunn?" I asked, much surprised.

"Yes, he has just got a letter, you know, and it seems he must go at once. He looks in a dreadful way, and Mr. de Lusignan is exasperated, and mademoiselle sadly cut up! And I really am afraid this great Australian traveller has a temper. Poor little Harry ran up to him, poor child, and he scowled at the boy and pushed him away, and I thought, if Mrs. Henry

would try to come down, it might mend matters."

"Bessie," here said the voice of Elizabeth in a whisper.

I went up to the head of her bed and bent over her.

"Don't let her worry me so," she whispered in my ear; "take her away!"

"I believe we must both leave Mrs. Henry de Lusignan," I remarked, turning back to Miss Dunn.

"Ah, I suppose so," she said, with as much complacency as if I were giving her a piece of good news. I saw she would not go unless I did, so I turned to the door, and, opening it for her to pass first, I followed her out. She was going down-stairs, and I thought it best to go down with her. All the way down Miss Dunn deplored Mrs. Henry's neuralgia, and wondered if some drops which she had would not be efficacious in her case. She had gone up with the intention of proposing them, but had unaccountably forgotten to do so. And so she chatted on, tormenting me so that I would have given any thing to escape her, but not releasing me one second.

"They are not in the drawing-room," she said, as I was going to enter; "they are all in the garden with Miss Russell. I shall take you to the spot."

I groaned at Miss Dunn's officiousness, but, to do her justice, she had a purpose in sticking close to me, which she discovered after we had walked five minutes side by side.

"Nerves are the oddest things," she said; "and I think my drops are excellent; but that counter-stimulant is the best of all remedies. I don't mind telling you," she added, laughing in my face, "that I exaggerated a little, in order to rouse poor Mrs. Henry. Miss Russell sent me in for her fan, and so I thought I would try a counter-stimulant on Mrs. Henry. I find it wonderful at times on Miss Russell," she added, with rare coolness. I stood still and looked at her.

"Then Mr. de Lusignan's nephew is not going away!" I exclaimed.

"Well, you know, he said he was going to-day," she replied, smiling.

"But Mr. de Lusignan did not send for me," I persisted.

"He asked if I knew where you were," answered Miss Dunn with great tranquillity.

"In short, all you said up-stairs was invention!" I cried, fairly exasperated.

"Oh, dear, what an uncivilized word!" said Miss Dunn, still smiling. "You are not going away, Miss Carr?"

"Yes, I am," I answered, indignantly; "since Mr. de Lusignan did not send for me, I have no wish to go to him now."

And without deigning to give this arrant deceiver a look, I walked back to the house. I thought it but right to go and tell Elizabeth that there was not one word of truth in all that Miss Dunn had been saying, for the kind purpose of curing her neuralgia by a counter-stimulant. But who says that evil has not its day and its hour? This petty and mean artifice of Miss Dunn's, so shallow that she did not even attempt to hide it, accomplished the object she had in view, as surely as if it had been a deeply-laid plan.

When I reached the room of Elizabeth, her bed was empty, she was gone—gone to meet the snare—gone to fall into the pit dug beneath her feet. I hurried down-stairs again, thinking to overtake her; but I had missed her coming in, and when, hastening through the garden, I reached the spot to which Miss Dunn was leading me, I saw Elizabeth, who must have taken a short cut by walking through the flower-beds, coming toward the group gathered round the Chinese pavilion. Miss Russell, in her yellow chair, and Miss Dunn, were in the deepest and coolest part of the little building. Mademoiselle sat near the door, and Mr. de Lusignan and his nephew stood outside in the shade. Elizabeth paused as she reached them. She was pale as death, but perfectly calm. She was fully dressed, and wore her hat as if she wanted to take a morning walk.

"I am glad you made the effort, Elizabeth," said Mr. de Lusignan, looking first at her, then at his nephew.

His voice was cold as ice and hard as steel. I felt faint and sick with terror at what was coming; for that it was coming at last, I knew.

"Come in here to us, Mrs. Henry," cried Miss Russell from within, and her dark face looked out through the window, "it is so cool in here."

Elizabeth did not answer. I do not think she heard, and I am sure she did not see Miss Russell.

"I believe you are strangers," resumed Mr. de Lusignan; then, after a pause, "Elizabeth, allow me to introduce my nephew to you."

Harry bowed gravely; Elizabeth looked civil, but distant; then leaning against the tall pedestal of one of the two stone vases which stood on either side of the door, she looked at the silver stars which spangled her black fan. She seemed very calm, as I said, but I could see her bosom heaving under her lace *fichu*.

"And this is my grandson," said Mr. de Lusignan, as little Harry went bounding by.

Elizabeth raised her eyes; they gave Mr. de Lusignan a flashing glance of defiance; then she bent them again on her fan.

"A fine boy," said his nephew, but he never looked at the child.

"You will be sure to get your neuralgia back again if you stay out there," said Miss Russell, again thrusting her head out of the window.

"Harry, you are going to-day, you say; before you go, be arbiter between your cousin's widow and me," said Mr. de Lusignan. "If this boy's mother, being still so young, must needs change her name and go to another home, should not, in common justice, the boy stay with me?"

I saw Elizabeth biting her pale lips, but she said not a word. Harry, however, showed some emotion.

"And is this event so imminent?" he asked, huskily.

"It seemed to be so yesterday," replied Mr. de Lusignan, looking at Elizabeth.

She remained in the same attitude, leaning against the pedestal, and still toying with her fan, but otherwise as immovable as a martyr at the stake. Harry raised his eyes to her face, and looked at her steadily; then turned them away and only said:

"In-deed!"

"Surely you see no objection to it," said his uncle, with a bitter laugh; "time passes over every grief, and young and beautiful widows will be admired and have their chance of wooers; but a woman might go farther and fare worse than with Mr. Gray."

"Indeed!" said Harry, looking at Elizabeth again.

Death is not paler than her face was then.

"Yes, indeed," said my guardian, laughing again, though the veins in his forehead were thick and swollen with passion. "You seem amazed, Harry, instead of wishing all happiness to the bride."

His nephew neither answered nor seemed to heed him.

"Elizabeth," he said.

She looked at him without stirring.

"Come here," he added, gently. She went up to him; he took her hand and drew her to his side, and said tenderly, "How could you doubt me?"

She did not answer, but clasped her two arms around his neck, and laying her head on his shoulder, she said, "At last, at last!"

"Uncle," said Harry, looking up in Mr. de

Lusignan's face, "why have you done this? Elizabeth is my wife, and it seems that you know it. Then why did you not say to me last night, the wife whom you are seeking, the child of whose very existence you are ignorant, are both here under my roof? Why did you not even give me time to tell you the truth when I learned it an hour ago. Did you think I wished to cheat you? Above all, why have you been so needlessly cruel to her? Uncle, I find it hard to forgive you!"

"You find it hard," cried Mr. de Lusignan, all his pent-up passion breaking forth; "will you tell me what I must feel? I who, for the last year, have been cheated into believing this woman my son's widow, and her child his child, when a word would have undeceived me. Last night when we knew you were coming, when we guessed at last who and what she was, your friend—" his hand pointed to mademoiselle—"did all she could to make her confess, and she failed. Your wife, since she is your wife, had grown hardened in her sin, and would confess nothing—nothing. Why so? Would she not have been dear to us, for your sake? Should I have not loved your boy, Harry?"

"The sin is mine," he answered, coloring deeply. "When I pledged myself to go out with O'Donnell, I was not married, for he would have none but single men, as perhaps you know. The expedition was abandoned, then taken up again, but in the interval Elizabeth had become my wife. If I had acknowledged our marriage, the world would have said: 'He married because the expedition is one of great danger, and his heart failed him at the eleventh hour.' Elizabeth sacrificed her liberty—she risked her fair name, to save my honor from doubt. She did what not a woman in a thousand would have done. She let me go, and never tried to keep me by telling me of my unborn child."

"I agree with you," angrily said Mr. de Lusignan; "not a woman in a thousand would have done it—not a woman in a thousand would, while by no means sure of her first husband's death, think of a second."

"Uncle," said Harry, with strange gentleness, "passion blinds you. You are attempting a cruel thing—thank God that it is an impossible thing. Neither you nor any one else in the wide world can shake my faith in the love of this woman. It is no use," he added, with a triumphant smile, "she would have died ten times rather than have betrayed my secret, and let a stain fall on my honor! And yet I was thought dead, and, as you say, she thought me dead. As to

Mr. Gray, Elizabeth would never have married him."

"And I say she would have married him in a week," interrupted Mr. de Lusignan.

"She would never have married him!" confidently resumed his nephew. "At the eleventh hour, at the foot of the altar, she would have said, 'No,' or run away, or done something or other; but she would never have been his wife."

As he said this, Elizabeth raised her face from his shoulder, and, looking up to him, laughed silently.

"And now," said Harry, with a sigh, "for the second time we part. It is your doing, not mine. I would gladly have rested a while with you, but how can I? I must go and take away my wife and my child from your keeping."

Mr. de Lusignan did not answer. He listened with a moody face to the joyous shouting of Harry, who was playing somewhere near us, unconscious of the drama going on close by. That boy was not his grandson, and he had known it for some time; but he had not been able to tear him from his heart. He had made the attempt, as I had seen, and he had failed. He loved him still, and could not help loving him. And now the child that was not his, must go from him forever away, with his resentful and surely much-injured mother.

"Elizabeth," said Harry, looking down at his wife.

"You will not go at once," said Mr. de Lusignan, huskily.

Harry looked at his wife again.

"Not a moment, not a second!" she cried, impetuously; and, turning round, she called in her clear voice:

"Harry, Harry, come here!"

The boy was invisible, but at her call he came, running. He rushed toward us, flushed and breathless.

O grandpa!" he shouted, "I've got a bird—I've got a bird!"

He stood before us with the anxious head of the little prisoner peeping out of his hand, its black, bead-like eyes moving restlessly.

"Let the bird go," said Mr. de Lusignan. His tone was so strange that the boy obeyed mechanically. He opened his hand; with a cry of surprise and joy the bird escaped, wheeled round, then flew away on joyous wing to happy liberty.

"O grandpa!" exclaimed Harry, much dismayed, "it gone—it gone!"

Mr. de Lusignan said not a word. He took up the boy, kissed him very softly, then walked away, without giving any of us a look. The

tears were flowing down mademoiselle's pale cheeks, for Harry and Elizabeth had gone up to her chair and stood arm-in-arm before her.

"God bless you, Harry!" she said.

Elizabeth slipped her arm from her husband's, and, kneeling on the floor of the pavilion, passed her two arms around mademoiselle.

"I would have told you," she said, "but it was his secret, not mine." Mademoiselle stooped and kissed her very fondly, but she did not speak.

"We are going to London," said Harry; "can we not see you there?"

Elizabeth took her husband's arm, and moved on, and her eyes did not once fall upon me! I could not bear this. I sprang toward her. I clasped my arms around her neck.

"Elizabeth, Elizabeth!" was all I could say.

"Good-by, my darling," she said, very tenderly, and she kissed me again and again.

"Good-by!" I echoed. "O Elizabeth! shall we never meet again—never?"

"Good-by," she repeated, and kissed me again more kindly than before; then leaning on her husband's arm, and, taking her child by the hand, she walked away. Mademoiselle rose and followed them slowly, while I stood looking after them, nearly blinded by tears.

"Brown—where is Brown?" cried Miss Russell's irate voice from inside the pavilion.—

"Wheel me out, Miss Dunn!"

"Yes, dear," sweetly answered Miss Dunn, "only don't put yourself out."

"I will!" cried Miss Russell, still wrathful. "Do you call that civility, visitors who come to your house to have their tantrums out; and who no more mind you when talking than if you were a stock or a stone? Did I not tell that Mrs. Harry to come in here, on account of her neuralgia, and did she even so much as answer me?"

"Very uncivil," murmured Miss Dunn, wheeling out the yellow chair; and as it went by me, Miss Russell, giving me a look of defiance, exclaimed at the pitch of her voice:

"I'll have no more visitors with their flounces and their bounces, I can tell you! I'll have no more visitors!"

I am sorry to have to record such vulgar words, but you see Miss Russell was a vulgar woman, and, being a rich one, laid no sort of restraint on her temper; I wonder how I remembered what she said, for my heart was very full, so full that I was not aware of Mr. Herbert till he stood by my side. I suppose he had met Elizabeth and her husband, for he said to me, "You are crying, Bessie; well, cry, it will do you good, for you have seen your last of Elizabeth."

His voice was so gentle, his look was so kind, that I turned to him with involuntary emotion. He asked for no pledge, and I gave him none—but I was his from that moment, and he knew it.

That same afternoon my guardian left Hanvil. Before he went away he said to me:

"You shall have your way this time, Bessie."

"My way, sir!"

"Well, Mr. Herbert's way then," he replied, impatiently. "Mademoiselle will see to all that."

This was our parting. Mr. de Lusignan appeared again on my wedding-day, then vanished for years; but he gave me dear mademoiselle, and I did not miss him much. Through her, and only through her, Mr. Herbert and I heard of Elizabeth and her husband. I need not tell here the story of Harry de Lusignan. He has written it himself in pages never to be forgotten. Simply and modestly he has told that wonderful tale of adventure, and suffering, and treachery, and late atonement, which thrilled through every heart in the land; but let none seek for the name of Elizabeth in that book. What she bore for his sake, how she would have perished rather than have confessed the secret which she had guarded so bravely and so long, and how, even when all could read through the cobweb, she fought as bravely for it as if it had been the darkest shroud of mystery, her husband has never told; the sin he has forgiven, and the love he remembers still. What more shall I tell? Why, that Mr. Gray slipped through Miss Dunn's fingers after all, and that Miss Russell is the same as ever, and that Polly is very good. As for me, I am a happy woman—need I say more?

















